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# Reverend Jonathan Fisher: One Thread in the Web of Early American Education, 1780-1830

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**REVEREND JONATHAN FISHER: ONE THREAD IN THE WEB OF EARLY  
AMERICAN EDUCATION, 1780 to 1830**

By

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Bachelor of Arts, University of California, San Diego

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts (in History)

The University of Maine

August 2015

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Judd, Adelaide and Alan Bird Professor of History

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**REVEREND JONATHAN FISHER: ONE THREAD IN THE WEB OF EARLY  
AMERICAN EDUCATION, 1780 TO 1830**

By Brittany Patricia Cathey

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Liam Riordan

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Arts  
(in History)  
August 2015

Jonathan Fisher was a remarkably gifted man with a passionate interest in the education of the future generations of Maine citizens. No historian, however, has yet to examine Jonathan Fisher's connection to American educational trends. Primary and secondary schools had existed in colonial America since the 1630s. Fisher witnessed and participated in the transformation of American schooling through his involvement in the local schools, libraries and education within his home, his establishment and maintenance of the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary and the publication of his juvenile works *The Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals*.

The first chapter of the thesis will first begin by examining the works of those who have already studied the life and accomplishments of the Reverend Jonathan Fisher. There will be a particular focus on the works of Mary Ellen Chase and Kevin D. Murphy. The chapter will then study the manuscripts of Bernard Bailyn, Lawrence Cremin, and James Axtell who were concerned with the educational development of colonial and federal America. The chapter will end with an analysis of the works of Donald M. Scott and Stephen A. Marini who investigated the role of the New England minister in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries.

The second chapter will analyze Fisher's primary educational contributions. The chapter begins with an examination of primary education during the period and proceeds with an evaluation of Fisher's role as a teacher and supporter of education. This chapter relies mostly on Fisher's journals as a primary source.

The third chapter evaluates Fisher's influence upon secondary education, particularly the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary. The prevalent primary sources include Fisher's journal and student workbooks and the secondary source *The Academies of Blue Hill Maine*.

The thesis concludes with an examination of Fisher's educational works *The Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals*. The chapter begins with a short history of primers and closes with an analysis of *The Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals*.

Jonathan Fisher was a Congregational minister on the Maine frontier; however he also desired to incorporate Blue Hill into the greater American intellectual culture. This thesis utilizes Fisher's journals and other reliable primary and secondary sources in order to secure his place as an essential component to the development of education in the greater Penobscot area.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

#### Introduction

Twentieth century children's author Scott O'Dell stated in an interview, "I want to teach and say something to people. Adults have pretty well established their lives, but you can say something to children. If you can get their attention and affection, then there is something that can really be done with children."<sup>1</sup> Authors, philosophers, artists, and scientists have long sought to influence the attitudes and understandings of children. Historian Karin Calvert in her work *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* also maintained, "Every culture defines what it means to be a child, how children should look and act, what is expected of them, and what is considered beyond their capabilities."<sup>2</sup> The world is maintained through the perceptions of the current generation once their forefathers have passed on. This focus upon the malleability of children is particularly relevant in education.

John Locke was one of the first to argue that children could be manipulated by their environments and education. He contended,

The well educating of their children is so much the duty and concern of parents, and the welfare and prosperity of the nation so much depends on it, that I would have everyone lay it seriously to heart and ... set his helping hand to promote everywhere that way of training up youth ... which is the easiest, shortest, and likeliest to produce virtuous, useful, and able men in their distinct callings.<sup>3</sup>

The Lockean notion that children were blank slates displaced the principle that they were innately sinful in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> He argued that children were not

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Fisher and Justin Wintle, *The Pied Pipers: Interviews with the Influential Creators of Children's Literature* (New York: Paddington Press, 1975), 173.

<sup>2</sup> Karin Calvert, *Children in the House: The Material Culture of Early Childhood, 1600-1900* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>3</sup> John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* ed. Reverend R.H. Quick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 50.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

born with innate knowledge and therefore should be taught values and virtues in order to develop into capable adults.

Jonathan Fisher (1768-1847) was a remarkably gifted man with a passionate interest in the education of children in Maine in the early republic. He was born in New Braintree, Massachusetts, and was raised in the home of an uncle who was a minister. He studied liberal arts and divinity at Harvard. He was not only the first Congregational minister in Blue Hill, Maine, but a farmer, scientist, mathematician, surveyor, and writer of prose and poetry. He wrote and bound his own books, designed and built furniture and other wood creations, was a reporter for the local newspaper, and built his own home.

Like Locke, Fisher wished to teach children values so that they would become productive and virtuous adults. He was an “Enlightenment Christian” who was able to reconcile his religious beliefs with scientific knowledge. Numerous Congregationalists believed that one of the purposes of Christianity was to understand God; however, he also assumed that science and philosophy could contribute to one’s knowledge of God. For Fishers, God’s will could explain both personal and scientific phenomenon. His trust in the Enlightenment’s support of empiricism, scientific rigor, and reductionism and his certainty in the ultimate authority of Christianity, were extraordinary on the Northeastern frontier and transferred into his love and encouragement of education.

Fisher has received a larger amount of attention in the last twenty years. No historian, however, has closely examined Jonathan Fisher’s connection to early American educational developments. Primary and secondary schools had existed in colonial America since the 1630s. He witnessed and participated in the transformation of American schooling through his involvement in the local schools, libraries and education within his home, his establishment and

maintenance of the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary and the publication of his juvenile works *The Youth's Primer* (1817) and *Scripture Animals* (1834). His educational efforts were infused by his Enlightenment Christianity.

Late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Maine was largely regarded as a frontier or the extreme limit of settled land beyond which lay wilderness. Historian Alan Taylor offered a schematic view of New Englanders active in Maine during this period, “labor applied to wilderness land to create property, a spiritual search for divine meaning, and organized resistance to the Great Proprietors.”<sup>5</sup> Fisher certainly migrated to Maine for economic and religious purposes, but created more than a successful homestead and weekly sermons. R.G.F. Candage in his “Memoir of the Reverend Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine” remarked, “The history of our New England towns, if truthfully written, would bring to light many instances of heroic devotion to the interests of the people, by the clergymen of the old school, which have much to do in the shaping and advancing of our civilization.”<sup>6</sup> He was dedicated to the educational advancement of the people in the greater Penobscot region and through his devoted labor connected “Maine” to broader cultural trends throughout New England

### **Works Concerning Jonathan Fisher**

Several works have been written about the noteworthy Reverend Jonathan Fisher.<sup>7</sup> R.G.F. Candage, Abbots Lowell Cummings, Alice Winchester, and Gaylord Crossette Hall provided

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<sup>5</sup> Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1990), 3.

<sup>6</sup> R.G.F. Candage, *Memoir of Rev. Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine* (Bangor, Maine: B. A. Burr, 1889), 229.

<sup>7</sup> Full references: Abbott Lowell Cummings, “The House the Parson Built” in *Old Time New England Magazine*, Volume LVI, 4 (April-June 1996) 91-107; Alice Winchester, *Versatile Yankee: The Art of Jonathan Fisher, 1768-*

superficial overviews of Fisher's life and achievements. Candage's speech was immensely dependent upon Fisher's journal and mostly summarized the events in Fisher's life. He was incredibly praiseworthy and dubbed Fisher "an active and earnest friend of education."<sup>8</sup> A few others such as W.R. Deane actually quoted Candage word-for-word in their speeches and articles.<sup>9</sup> Hall provided an equally cursory synopsis, which also summarized the life of Fisher and principally utilized his journals. He similarly admired Fisher's achievements and provided very little criticism. Cummings examined the architecture of Fisher's home, while Alice Winchester surveyed his art. Both academics commended Fisher and did not stray far from their somewhat circumscribed topics.

Mary Ellen Chase in *Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, 1768-1847* was one of the first scholars to thoroughly investigate the life of Jonathan Fisher. She used mostly letters and his diary to portray the Reverend Jonathan Fisher as a decrepit, outdated clergyman on the border of the Maine wilderness. She described Fisher as a "rugged frontiersman, jack-of-all-trades, moral and spiritual mentor of generations. Immensely versatile, he was yet too prudent and too orthodox a man to be called an eccentric."<sup>10</sup> She further remarked that he was impoverished despite his efforts to improve his income through various hobbies and occupations. Fisher witnessed the dwindling of his traditional Congregational church, the flourishing of local Baptist churches and an influx of "unorthodox" doctrine in his community. She described his religious creed as "a high and dry Calvinism with no unusual notes at all."<sup>11</sup>

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1847, (Philadelphia: Pyne Press, 1973); *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine*, (1945), Gaylord Crossette Hall, *Biographical Sketch of the Rev. Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine* (1945).

<sup>8</sup> Candage, 228.

<sup>9</sup> W. R. Deane, *Reverend Jonathan Fisher, of Blue Hill, Maine* (New England Historic Genealogical Society: 1868), 273-276.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Ellen Chase, *Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson, 1768-1847* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1948), 5.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

Chase insisted that Jonathan Fisher was out-of-touch with early republican society. He chose the more remote of two fields open to him, bypassing Ashby, Massachusetts, in favor of in Blue Hill, Maine, in (1794). She contended that Fisher was “ too intensely busy, with his Hebrew Lexicon and his Malay New Testament, with his poems and his paintings, with his vegetables and animals, to grow sour as a new age came on and tended to leave him stranded.”<sup>12</sup> She primarily depicted Fisher as a dusty Congregational clergyman so absorbed in his own doings that he ignored the wider world.

Chase was incredibly critical of Fisher; nevertheless, she did reserve a few kind words about his educational achievements and his passion for teaching. She argued that Fisher was an enthusiastic trainer of future ministers. He “cared deeply for the nurture of their minds as well as for the salvation of their souls.”<sup>13</sup> He was also deeply concerned about his young parishioners and stressed texts such as the Epistles and the Books of Timothy and Titus, which exhibited model behavior. She overall provided very few details of Fisher’s educational contributions, but concluded that Fisher had a “love for imparting information.” She did not expand further upon this declaration.<sup>14</sup>

Jane Bianco argued that Fisher’s work *Scripture Animals* was a reflection of his love for studying, teaching and drawing, while his *Youth’s Primer* was a mixture of admonitions to read the Bible and a discussion of nature. Bianco stated that, “travel....informed his creative output of letters and diaries, drawings and painting.”<sup>15</sup> He was fascinated by both the natural and built landscapes he encountered at home and in his travels and these influences informed his work. *Scripture Animals* and *Youth’s Primer* were designed to reflect the logic he used in teaching with

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., xvii.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>15</sup> Jane Bianco, *The Wondrous Journey: Jonathan Fisher and the Making of Scripture Animals* (Rockland, Maine: The Farnsworth Art Museum, 2003), 30.

the inclusion of couplets, Biblical references and explanations of symbols and metaphors. Bianco reasoned that Fisher's rationale for preaching to children was to foster the next generation of orthodox Congregationalists, despite changing religious values driven especially by the Second Great Awakening. *Scripture Animals* and *Youth's Primer* were ultimately influenced by older models such as the *New England Primer*, but reflected his own philosophies regarding religion, education, and nature.

Academic Raoul N. Smith was fascinated by Fisher's "philosophical alphabet."<sup>16</sup> Fisher created this phonetic writing system that was based upon sounds of speech. His journals were written with this code. Raoul argued that much of Fisher's alphabet was inspired by Noah Webster who worked to create a distinctly American version of English. He concluded that investigations into codes written by Fisher and other educated men from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century will give us insight into the period's speech patterns.

Kevin D. Murphy's *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier* described a far more cosmopolitan clergyman who connected his community to the larger New England culture. He explored a "personal and professional identity for him" that utilized a wide variety of sources such as Fisher's home belongings and literary and artistic contributions to demonstrate how Jonathan Fisher used his skills as a painter, architect, writer and teacher to supplement his paltry income and secure his position among the elite of the community.<sup>17</sup> Murphy further argued that the Maine frontier provided the opportunity for a person to personally influence a new community, the potential to clearly observe change, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Raoul N. Smith, "The Philosophical Alphabet of Jonathan Fisher", *American Speech*, Volume 50, Number ½ (Spring-Summer, 1975), 36. <http://www.jstor.org.prxy4.ursus.maine.edu/stable/3087862>

<sup>17</sup> Kevin D. Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 1.



chance to make a profit.<sup>18</sup> He desired to evaluate the usefulness of artistic abilities and training on the frontier, the attitudes of the “elite,” such as ministers, to their new society, the contributions of the “unsung” to the work of a leading cultural producer and the achievements of the elite in relation to the efforts of the poor and unskilled.

Fisher defended his religious and political authority against challenges from evangelical sects, struggles between rural and commercial powers, and frontier Jeffersonian democracy. Murphy insisted that in Fisher’s painting, *Morning View of Blue Hill Village*, Fisher centered his household in the middle of the painting in order to indicate that his family was at the heart of the increasing metropolitan nature of Blue Hill. He illustrated fields and farms dotting the once-forested landscape. Public buildings, wharves, and ships also referenced the growing economic prosperity of Blue Hill. Richard Judd in his review of Murphy’s book noted that it “connects Blue Hill to the larger world by immersing Fisher in a general discussion of backcountry cultural conflicts, changing levels of literacy, an emerging popular print culture, and the social and symbolic importance of decorative and landscape painting.”<sup>19</sup>

Kevin Murphy highlighted the increased literacy rates and enhanced culture of Blue Hill, Maine; however, his discussions of the educational contributions of Jonathan Fisher to his community were limited. He did note that a large portion of Fisher’s intellectual reputation was due to his ability to share his knowledge with others on the Eastern Frontier.<sup>20</sup> Fisher would often take-on boarders and provide them with housing, food, and education in exchange for labor. The role of Fisher as a teacher was primarily viewed as symbolic of his cultural and political importance in the Blue Hill community. He also contended that “the business of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Judd, “Review of Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier” *The New England Quarterly*, Volume 84, Issue 4, February 2011, 736.

<sup>20</sup> Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier*, 177.

instructing” was also a way to supplement the small income of the minister.<sup>21</sup> Chase, by contrast, believed that Fisher labored in the field of education because he passionately loved learning and wished to impart his own knowledge to eager students. Murphy, however, primarily concluded that it was a matter of authority and status that rested on Fisher’s ability to transmit his Harvard education to others.

Murphy aptly contextualized Fisher’s role in a growing cosmopolitan area. Throughout the nineteenth-century Blue Hill became a center of shipbuilding in the Penobscot region. Fisher also maintained numerous contacts in distant metropolitan centers such as Portland and Boston. Fisher continuously worked to develop urban institutions such as libraries and schools. He remained deeply engaged in the greater world and brought modern establishments into Blue Hill.

Teachers would have certainly been viewed as part of the educational elite in towns such as Blue Hill; however, the profession provided a paltry income. Several of Fisher’s educational contributions were also voluntary or went beyond simply asserting his elite status. Fisher may have been partly motivated to remain active in the educational community due to his status goals and monetary concerns, but it was ultimately the passion described by Mary Ellen Chase that drove his actions. Both Murphy and Chase contended that Fisher was a stoic and stodgy Congregationalist who defended his religion from outside influences. He was an Enlightenment Christian who did not feel threatened from other points of view. He insisted that science and history could be explained through Christianity. He was therefore not opposed to outside views and influences and spread both secular and religious knowledge. Numerous teachers focused either upon secular or religious education. He encouraged both. He was a zealous teacher who helped to bring the residents of a frontier town into the fold of the growing educational community of the young United States.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 144.

## **Works Concerning American Education**

Several historians throughout the late twentieth century linked education to the development of American culture and prosperity and as a combatant against an unknown and frightening frontier. Numerous historians have studied the relationship between education and concerns over spatial and psychological proximity to a “frontier.” Bernard Bailyn in his work *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* and James Axtell in *The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in New England* noted that the development of colonial education was a conscious effort to preserve English culture, while Lawrence A. Cremin, in *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* contended that the exertion was largely unintentional.

Bailyn’s work *Education in the Forming of American Society* contended that previous historians had merely been interested in tracing the heritage of public education as opposed to studying its more diverse forms in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. The history of education had branched off from more conventional forms of history at the beginning of the twentieth century. “Educationists” or those promoters of public education adopted this segment of history in order to promote the public education system.<sup>22</sup> Horace Mann was a politician and educational reformer who supported public education. Educator Ellwood P. Cubberly argued “no one did more than he to establish in the minds of the American people the conception that education should be universal, non-sectarian, free, and that its aims should be social efficiency, civic virtue, and character, rather than mere learning or the advancement of sectarian ends.”<sup>23</sup>

Education historians were filled with such admiration for Mann’s efforts; they ignored other

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (New York City: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 1960), 3-15.

<sup>23</sup> Ellwood P. Cubberly, *Public Education in the United States* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1919), 167. Archive.org Edition. [https://archive.org/stream/publiceducationi032029mbp/publiceducationi032029mbp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/publiceducationi032029mbp/publiceducationi032029mbp_djvu.txt)

reformers and other methods of education. Interest in traditional school institutions resulted in the loss of a broader understanding of contemporary methods and content of education as well as non-modern understandings of curriculum in early America.

Bailyn sought to define the scope of colonial and early republican education "...not only as a formal pedagogy but as the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations."<sup>24</sup> He claimed that the colonists originally desired to simply preserve the English education system. This structure was erected around apprenticeship training and private lessons. Education was largely a personal, familial matter and the government and church contributed minimally to its organization. He asserted that the traditional system of English education shattered in the colonial setting. Familial stability was disrupted by the closeness of the "wilderness," the apparent abundance of "free" land, the failure to implement English institutions and the tendency of isolated communities to devise their own establishments and customs.<sup>25</sup> He defined the wilderness for the settlers as "strange and forbidding, full of unexpected problems and enervating hardships. To none was there available reliable lore or reserves of knowledge and experience to draw upon in gaining control over the environment."<sup>26</sup> According to Bailyn, the parents were as clueless about their environment and circumstances as their children. The schools that existed in the colonial period had formerly been privately funded and had conformed to English standards. The Massachusetts Education Law of 1647 required that all towns with more than fifty families hire a schoolmaster. Towns with more than one hundred families were required to have a grammar school. This law was not heavily enforced and several towns were simply too poor or too ambivalent to hire a schoolmaster or established a grammar school. He noted that educational establishments are generally sensitive to community issues and thus

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<sup>24</sup> Bailyn., 21.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 44-46.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 22.

reflect local interests. Education, however, is not merely a reflection of society since it can also advance the community. Families had experienced a great transformation by the end of the colonial period. He concluded that education in the early republic emerged as a “controversial, conscious and constructed...matter of decision, will and effort.”<sup>27</sup> Schooling slowly became recognized as an agent of social change. The proximity of the frontier pressured colonists to adopt more formal and conscious educational programs. This process was accelerated by the chaos of the American Revolution and was well underway during Jonathan Fisher’s lifetime.

Lawrence A. Cremin forged a connection between education and American colonial society as well. He sought to unearth unconscious educational processes including families, churches, denominationalism, revivalism, economic growth, demography, the development of the sciences, the educational theories of the Renaissance, and printers, newspapers and voluntary associations. He desired to uncover how European theories impacted American educational norms and its manifestation in the late eighteenth-century. He noted that piety, civility and an emphasis on learning were the hallmarks of seventeenth and eighteenth-century English educational theory. He further suggested that colonies were “part of a hinterland attached to London” and therefore analyzed the variances of educational development in colonial America.<sup>28</sup> The regional diversity of colonial religion guaranteed that educational institutions would lack uniformity. Communities would adopt aspects of English theory that applied to their own religious beliefs and communal realities. He remarked that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, new theories began to offer ulterior goals for education. John Locke contended that education should be a secular and tolerant matter, schooling was of particular use for cultivating the upper

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>28</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row 1970), 102.

classes and that education should develop a cultivated and knowledgeable society.<sup>29</sup> Benjamin Franklin suggested that education was essential to the creation of the self-made man and independent businesses.<sup>30</sup> Such strands of thought indicated that cohesive structures of education would enhance society. Cremin concluded that such theories encouraged families, churches, colleges, and other institutions to formalize education and develop useful citizens for the nation.

James Axtell in his work *The School upon the Hill: Education and Society in New England* also recognized a deep connection between education and social structures. He sought to uncover how children were trained for a successful life in colonial society, and how the process of education encouraged the preservation and transmission of New England culture. He recognized that “there can be no coherent social life unless the social relationships that bind people together are at least to some extent orderly, institutional and predictable. If they are not, chaos reigns and society dissolves.”<sup>31</sup> Education within the community was a process through which New England society communicated both written and assumed rules and maintained its cultural identity. He examined religious and educational training, both formal and informal, of New England youth, the decline of Puritanism, and the social conservatism that defined Puritan culture. He contended that courtship practices, child-rearing, religious institutions, occupational decisions, and college schooling helped to instill and reiterate cultural norms. He resolved that both formal and informal forms of education were part of a “deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit and evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills and sensibilities.”<sup>32</sup> His primary interest was socialization as a key foundation.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 420.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 433.

<sup>31</sup> James Axtell, *The School Upon a Hill: Education and Society in New England* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1974), 136.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., xi.

Axtell was inspired by the works of Bailyn and Cremin, but provided his own twist on their pioneering research. Cremin challenged future historians “to be somewhat bolder and more insistent in inquiring into the impact of American education, broadly conceived, on the American mind and character.”<sup>33</sup> Axtell was far more concerned about the far-reaching consequence of Puritan culture than he was about the minutia of everyday educational practices. He defined education as “the self-conscious pursuit of certain intellectual, social, and moral ideals (which makes it normative) by any society (from the family to the nation) that wishes to preserve and transmit its distinctive character to future generations (which makes it conservative).”<sup>34</sup> According to Axtell early American education was cultural self-preservation. He insisted that several of the traditional family responsibilities such as catechisms were transferred to schools and church. Families were not always consistent in the education of their children. Axtell argued that colonists hoped that schools and churches would be able to more reliably educate children. The church had failed to fulfill its “evangelical potential” with regards to the Halfway Covenant and Great Awakening.<sup>35</sup> Although numerous communities believed in the ideals of consensus and conformity, geographical mobility, increased immigration, new economic opportunities, and political fragmentation made replication impossible. Families ceded some of their responsibilities to institutions such as schools, which were fortresses of social order. He concluded that, “Not until the thirteen colonies rebelled from the mother country and set off on a new mission of national assertion did education and society in New England recapture the drive and purpose that founded them.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Cremin, xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Axtell, xi-xii.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 288.

This recent work on education aimed to uncover the connection between American colonial educational and cultural developments. Their predecessors had focused primarily upon the growth of the public education system in the early-nineteenth century and as a result ignored alternate, informal methods of schooling. Bailyn, Cremin, and Axtell determined that education was deliberate, systematic and a sustained effort to transmit and evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities<sup>37</sup>. Colonists became increasingly afraid that their society lacked coherence and reason due to their proximity to the American “wilderness” and the proliferation of religious division.<sup>38</sup>

The historians disagreed however, over the prevalence of traditional English systems of education and the effects of the “wilderness” upon this transference. Bailyn insisted that the colonists had fully intended to adopt English methods, but the strangeness of the new land prevented these systems from flourishing. Cremin maintained that the colonists did uphold English systems, but simply adapted to their various new conditions as needed. Axtell argued that New Englanders tried to create their own unique educational systems, but were forced to adopt English institutions due to geographic, population, and cultural pressures.

Evidence to support the arguments of these varied scholars can be found in the journals and writings of Jonathan Fisher. As a resident of the Province of Maine, he was certainly in close proximity to the wilderness. Many of his efforts worked to “civilize” Blue Hill and the greater Penobscot area. The culture he brought with him from long-settled regions of Massachusetts in 1787 appears to have been a mixture of both original New England and traditional English processes. The fact that he was able to train as a minister at Harvard despite his economic disadvantages is an American concept in itself. The ministry of early America undoubtedly

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., xi.

<sup>38</sup> Bailyn, 44, and Perry Miller “Errand into the Wilderness” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Volume 10 (1953), 3-19.



differed from its counterparts in Europe. Much of the curriculum however, was still English. During his college career he read works by Virgil, Cicero, Xenophon, Homer, Euclid, and numerous other non-Christian authors. He was expected to read textbooks like Milliot's *Elements of History*, Ozman's *Perspective*, and Leland's *Principles of Eloquence*. He therefore was exposed to both American and English and Christian and secular works that he later brought to the Maine frontier.<sup>39</sup>

Despite their disagreements, Bailyn, Cremin and Axtell concur that by the mid-eighteenth century, education had become more formalized. Fisher witnessed and fostered this process with the creation of the Blue Hill Academy, Bangor Theological Seminary, and his various informative publications.

### **Ministers and Culture**

Religious division was a particular issue for ministers in frontier towns. Donald M. Scott's *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850* and Stephen A. Marini's "Religious Revolution in the District of Maine, 1780-1820" both examined the role of ministers as cultural authorities. Scott insisted that ministers were at the heart of all of institutional change in New England. The ministry was a form of public office during this period, and, above all else, a local office.

No other office in town had the same scope, and no other influence was so comprehensively felt. The minister purveyed ideas which connected the town to the broader culture and by which New Englanders interpreted life in all its personal and social dimensions...the presence of a good minister, permanently installed and bound to a town and church, transformed a mere settlement into a genuine, organic community.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Fisher recorded all of the works he read throughout his college career. This thesis uses Fisher, Jonathan and Raoul N. Smith, *The Life of Jonathan Fisher, Volume I, 1768-1798*, (Acton, Massachusetts: R.N. Smith, 2006) , Reference BX7260.F5 A3, Special Collections, Folger Library, University of Maine, 12-128.

<sup>40</sup> Donald M. Scott, *From Office to Profession: The New England Ministry, 1750-1850* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 16.

Fisher was trained in a period when, “The minister’s authority and overall position in the town derived from his occupancy of office and from social standing, from his possession of the social stature that town leaders possessed whether they had earned or were born to it...” and the most distinctive feature of eighteenth-century New England was “communalism,” “...a social structure and ideology in which order, harmony, and obedience to all authority were the highest public and social values.”<sup>41</sup> Ministers were respected and regarded as authorities in their towns because of their education. Few other townspeople would have been able to receive a college education during this period. A minister’s social status therefore stemmed from his formal training.

The rise of the two-party system after the American Revolution fundamentally altered the place of the clergy in New England’s public life. Clergy had an ambiguous relationship to the new political culture; they despised political parties and the “vile practice of electioneering” because they appeared to violate the concept that order was the function of public office and should be considered a higher duty.<sup>42</sup> By 1800 the overwhelming majority of New England Congregational clergymen were Federalists, which they were attracted to because it equated order with elite rule and the politics of deference. As public office became more in the domain of party managers, leaders of a unified community found themselves on the outside, more part of a Federalist constituency than elite. The relationship between church and social order had weakened because the congregation no longer encompassed the entire community and communities developed multiple congregations. By the early-nineteenth century, every institution outside of the church was considered a threat to the sacred. Scott insisted,

Not only did evangelicalism provide forms of self-discipline and a sense of belonging and self-esteem, but it also hedged the anarchy and anonymity of a life

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

of geographical mobility. When communicants moved to a new town, they found the evangelical church a ready-made community in which they were quickly accepted as genuine Christians and quickly forged trustworthy acquaintances.<sup>43</sup>

Evangelizing the nation required an expansion of the clergy and at the beginning of the 1800s the existing clergy made a concerted effort to recruit through education and societies. The theological seminary was a significant departure from earlier forms; “it erected and institutionalized as the norm a formal three-year curriculum, divided into a series of subjects, each of which was taught by a professor who had come to specialize in a particular branch of what came to be referred to as the “theological sciences”; This created a more professional form of ministerial consciousness.<sup>44</sup>

The amalgamation of tract, Bible, education, mission, reform, temperance, and Sabbath school societies into state and national organizations made them exert greater influence over the individual minister’s behavior and ministry. The rise of nationally organized evangelicalism transformed the occupational structure of the ministry and inspired very different patterns in clerical careers. Such a development created a lot of non-pastoral posts. In the eighteenth-century a “good” post was one which lent itself to stability and permanence. In the nineteenth-century a “good” post was one which could be useful to a greater evangelical cause. He noted,

The generation coming of age after 1815 was, on an unprecedented scale, a dislocation generation, forced to strike out on its own, making its way as it went with few family resources to begin with or fall back upon, with few clear-cut institutions to channel it, and with few unambiguous cues to follow....But if it was a condition of unprecedented freedom with a myriad of apparent choices and opportunities, it was at the same time a formless and fluid world that carried a heavy tax of anxiety and uncertainty and seemed to demand will, persistence, and extraordinary degrees of self-control it was to be mastered or survived.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 78-79.

Fisher was trained during a period in New England when the minister was one of the ultimate authorities in a town; however, he trained a generation of ministers who competed in a far more diverse religious marketplace where the ideal of a unified community was shattered by evangelical religion and new political partisanship. Fisher did not embrace the fervor that was a hallmark of groups like the Baptists and Methodists. Fisher moved to the Maine frontier before the national push westward, and thus was regarded as an intellectual and religious authority in his community.

Stephen A. Marini also explored how ministers were at the heart of New England culture. Coastal settlements such as Blue Hill were strongholds of Congregationalism and Federalism. Congregationalism produced a complex and extensive religious culture which was centered upon the ministry. Ministers held the credentials necessary to arbitrate taste and determine cultural legitimacy. Educated ministers were increasingly challenged throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries by the Second Great Awakening and related social and religious changes.<sup>46</sup> Separate and Freewill Baptists, Methodists and Shakers argued against the social and cultural norms of Congregationalism and Federalism. These varied religious groups maintained that the government had no place in religious matters. This directly challenged the role of ministers such as Fisher who were active in their churches and as civic leaders as well. Congregationalists remained crucial in the New England spiritual landscape, but their once dominant place was quickly overwhelmed by the sectarian movement. Congregational ministers in the early nineteenth-century had once been the essential cultural authorities in New England, but were confronted by new politics and sectarian movements. Murphy argued that Fisher deployed education in order to maintain his status in these changing circumstances. Fisher may

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<sup>46</sup> Marini, Stephen A., "Religious Revolutions in the District of Maine, 1780-1820" in eds. Charles E. Clark, James E. Leamon, Karen Bowden, *Maine in the Early Republic: From Revolution to Statehood* (Lebanon, New Hampshire: University of New England Press, 1988).

have felt that his station as an intellectual and religious authority was slowly diminishing; however, his love of education ultimately motivated him encourage and develop schools in the lower Penobscot region.

### **Conclusion and Chapter Overview**

Chapter two of this thesis will examine Fisher's involvement in primary education, or curriculum aimed at students between the ages of four and fourteen, and the education of his children and boarders. The chapter will first look at Kenneth Lockridge's argument about literacy in the colonial period. It will then use works by historians such as Walter Herbert Small, Mark Sammons, Jennifer E. Monaghan, Ava Harriet Chadbourne, Samuel Eliot Morison, and W.W. Stetson to create general picture of education in the early republic. The chapter will proceed chronologically and investigate Fisher's experience as a schoolmaster during his college years and as the definitive authority in Blue Hill on selecting teachers and curriculum, teaching the catechism, offering religious lectures, and training boarders for college. This section of the chapter heavily relies upon Fisher's journals as a primary source.<sup>47</sup>

The third chapter will evaluate Fisher's role in the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary. It begins with a description of the foundation of the Blue Hill Academy and proceeds to examine the school's curriculum and Fisher's activity there. This section uses Fisher's journals, *Course of Study- Blue Hill Academy and Free High School* (1831), several student workbooks from the early years of the Academy, Edward Lyon Linscott's "The History of Secondary Education in Washington and Hancock Counties in Maine," and *The Academies of*

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<sup>47</sup> This thesis uses Fisher, Jonathan and Raoul N. Smith, *The Life of Jonathan Fisher, Volume I, 1768-1798*, (Acton, Massachusetts: R.N. Smith, 2006), Maine, BX7260.F5 A3, Special Collections, Folger Library, University of Maine to look at Fisher's life up to 1798 and Jonathan Fisher and Edith Weren, *The Diaries of Jonathan Fisher: January 1820 - January 1835 Part II*, (Blue Hill, Maine: 2003), Reference 874.145, Blue Hill Public Library thereafter.

*Blue Hill, Maine, 1802-1952* by the Greater Committee of the George Stevens Academy. The chapter concludes with the history of the Bangor Theological Seminary. This portion once again depends on Fisher's journals. Fisher was a major advocate of the Academy and Seminary. He helped to found the institutions, establish curriculum, solicit subscriptions, and evaluate the students.

The final chapter looks at Fisher's *Scripture Animals* and *Youth's Primer*, both of which he intended for student readers. It first examines the history of the primer and its classic format. This section uses works by Paul Leicester Ford, Gail Schmunk Murray, Kyle B. Roberts, Patricia Crain, Gillian Brown, Gillian Avery, and Emory Elliot. The chapter then closely assesses *Scripture Animals* and the *Youth's Primer*. This part uses Fisher's journals, *Scripture Animals*, *Youth's Primer*, and the work of Jane Bianco. *Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals* highlighted his efforts to spread Enlightenment Christianity.

Fisher was a Congregational minister on the Maine frontier whom hoped to share his stance on Enlightenment Christianity. He acknowledged that secular education as necessary for a person to function in early republic society. A person on the Northeastern frontier could not survive on philosophy alone. Fisher certainly did not approve of trends such as the advent of the two-party system, however, he did not feel threatened by their presence. He was assured through his own faith that his conservative Congregationalism would withstand the test of time. Historians and scholars have examined colonial educational practices and rhetoric.

Academics like Chase and Murphy have argued that Fisher felt vulnerable forces he could not control and turned to education to regain some of his authority. He was far too confident in his spirituality to be threatened by secular education. This thesis examines how Reverend Jonathan Fisher shared his Enlightenment Christianity through primary education in his come

and community, secondary education through the Blue Hill Academy and Bangor Theological Seminary, and his publications *Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals*.

## CHAPTER TWO

### EDUCATION IN THE HOME AND AT THE PRIMARY LEVEL

#### Introduction

Jonathan Fisher's daughter Nancy once confessed, "O had I the wings of a dove and power to use them, I would soon be seated with you in that little room, consecrated to learning and Devotion and perhaps sometimes the Muses."<sup>48</sup> Nancy Fisher Kitteridge grew up to be an Enlightenment Christian like her father. In the quote above, Nancy remarked how much she enjoyed learning from her devotions and the muses.<sup>49</sup> Nancy married Hosea Kitteridge, a former student of her father's and a Congregational minister. Nancy and Hosea continued to study their devotions by remaining conservative Congregationalists and learn from the muses by studying metaphysics. The Kitteridge's even named one of their sons Pascal.<sup>50</sup> Blaise Pascal was a talented French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer and Christian philosopher. He argued that Christianity was the only religion that was compatible with human reason and logic. He supported this claim with support this claim with evidence from Scripture, ancient witnesses, miracles, prophecies, and hermeneutics. He noted that Christianity, however, could not be explained through reason alone. Pascal supported fideism which states religious truth is ascertainable by faith alone and that faith is separate from and superior to reason.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Nancy Fisher Kitteridge to Jonathan Fisher, (April 17, 1838) in Kevin D. Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 141.

<sup>49</sup> "Devotion" in this instance likely refers to Christianity while the "Muses" were the nine muses of ancient Greek mythology: Clio, muse of history and the guitar, Euterpe, muse of other musical instruments and dialectic, Thalia, muse of comedy, geometry, architectural science, and agriculture, Melpomene, muse of tragedy and rhetoric, Terpsichore, muse of the harp, dancing, and education, Erato, protector of love and muse of poetry, Polymnia, muse of grammar, divine hymns, and mimic art, Ourania, muse of astronomy, and Calliope, muse of heroic poems and rhetoric art.

<sup>50</sup> Dorothea Fisher Crosset to Nancy Fisher Kitteridge, (April 12, 1831) in Kevin D. Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 156.

<sup>51</sup> Blaise Pascal and T.S. Eliot, *Pascal's Pensées* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1958).



Kitteridge's admiration of Pascal further demonstrates their love of Enlightenment philosophies but belief that Christianity was the definitive authority. One could appreciate the Enlightenment but remain a strong Christian, like Pascal, and like the Fisher's.

Nancy's dedication to religion and philosophy indicates that she found the Enlightenment and Christianity compatible. Nancy was so secure in her own religion that she felt no threat to her faith when studying metaphysics. Fisher was determined to spread his Enlightenment Christianity through teaching schools in his college years in the early 1790s, opening, evaluating and selecting curriculum for schools in Blue Hill, offering catechism lessons and religious lectures, establishing and monitoring academies, boarding and teaching young men in his home, educating all of his children, and providing literature and other services to his community.

### **Literacy Rates**

Before one can engage in discussions of educational institutions, one first must first examine colonial and early republic literacy rates as well as literary production and its influence upon society. Kenneth Lockridge in his work *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* examined the rise of literacy in the American colonies during the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He studied signatures on wills to in order to track variations in literacy. He determined that sixty percent of signees could write their signature in 1660. This number rose to seventy percent in 1710, eighty-five percent in 1760 and near universal male literacy in 1785.<sup>52</sup>

Lockridge mirrored other scholars who assumed that signature rates indicated literacy because writing was generally learned after reading. He contended that rising literacy rates in New England were a consequence of Puritan compulsory public schooling. He differed from

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<sup>52</sup> Kenneth Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, Incorporated, 1974), 13.

some of his contemporaries by disagreeing that formal schooling implementation responded to the transformation of society and fears of the wilderness. Instead, he asserted that there was no relationship between the spread of literacy and the physical or social environment of New England colonial society. He observed that literacy rates never rose above sixty-seven percent in other colonies such as Pennsylvania and Virginia.<sup>53</sup> He therefore insisted that “intense Protestantism” enabled spectacular increase in literacy, since other colonies failed to match New England.<sup>54</sup> Pennsylvania was a religiously tolerant colony dominated by the Quakers, while numerous Southerners were either Anglican or disinterested in spiritual community. He concluded his study with comparisons to other Protestant countries, such as Sweden and Scotland, which also enjoyed higher literacy rates. Higher literacy rates were a phenomenon which existed throughout Anglo-American Protestant society. He stated, “...beneath New England’s burning Protestantism and consequent universal male literacy, Anglo-America was a world in which literacy moved glacially at the middling level.”<sup>55</sup> Literacy was associated with social status and therefore those who were illiterate were typically those of a lower socio-economic standing. Someone who could read was someone who was respected. These patterns in New England were similar to other patterns throughout Northern Europe. Jonathan Fisher was equally concerned with literacy rates. In *Scripture Animals*, he wished that children “may be able to read that best of books with a good understanding of its contents.”<sup>56</sup> If a child was unable to read they would not be able to have a “good understanding” of the Bible’s contents.<sup>57</sup>

### **Forms of Primary Education**

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Fisher, *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible*, Revised Edition (Princeton, New Jersey: Pyne Press, 1972), iv.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

Primary education assumed numerous forms during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Dame schools, or schools that were run by women inside of their homes, were a “necessity of the time.”<sup>58</sup> Families were expected to teach their children the basics of reading, nevertheless several failed to educate their children. Dame schools were often the only educational institutions in the area. Dame schools did not become publically sanctioned until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Female teachers continued to receive a smaller income than male schoolmasters, even when officially recognized by the community.

Towns frequently debated whether grammar schools should be located in one centralized location such as a large town square or as far-reaching as possible. Walter Herbert Small observed that colonists were unsure as to how to fund schools. Americans initially believed that schools would be supported through donations, tuition, subscriptions and land grants.<sup>59</sup> They resorted to taxation in the eighteenth century when their reliance upon charity failed. Maine quickly followed this pattern.

For most of the colonial period, reading instruction followed “the ordinary Road.”<sup>60</sup> The “ordinary Road”<sup>61</sup> began with the hornbook's ABC, or an alphabet with corresponding words and images, basic syllabary, and Lord's Prayer. It then proceeded through the primer, the Psalter, the New Testament, and the full Bible. Writing instruction was deemed essential for those entering commerce or grammar schools. Copybooks, therefore, highlighted penmanship rather than composition. They also often contained moral or religious lessons. Reading and writing instruction differed by gender, class, and age. Women were not usually taught to write unless

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<sup>58</sup> Walter Herbert Small, *American Education: Its Men, Ideas and Institutions and Early New England Schools* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 162.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 187

<sup>60</sup> Jennifer E. Monaghan *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), 25.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

they were members of the upper class. Slaves were occasionally allowed to be taught to read, but they were very rarely encouraged to write. Upper class males were generally the only people prepared and admitted into grammar schools. Classification of students could occupy several weeks of a teacher's time. Thanks to studying and recitation, each class could receive as little as nine to twelve minutes with the teacher; it sometimes took multiple terms for a preschool aged child to learn the alphabet because they received so little personal time with the teacher.<sup>62</sup>

Mark J. Sammons provided an overview of educational practices during this period. He noted that arithmetic was considered one of the most important subjects, however, it was not included in Massachusetts law until the eighteenth century and its commencement was restricted to preteens until the 1830s. Children learned arithmetic by transcribing the rules until they had an understanding of them. Children first studied the shapes of numbers and then proceeded to addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. More advanced students progressed to fractions, decimals, weights and measures, currency, simple algebraic equations, square roots, cubed roots and geometry. Students who could mentally solve arithmetic problems were more likely to learn written arithmetic. Mathematic practices remained relatively the same throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. More innovative educators attempted to promote teaching mathematics through analysis, however, it was difficult to teach this method to educators who themselves had been raised with the memorization method.

Reading and writing practices in the eighteenth century witnessed an incredible transformation. The secular spelling book was introduced between 1730 and 1740 and was a symbol that "the reading instructional road was being widened to permit more secular and

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<sup>62</sup> Mark J. Sammons, "Without a Word of Explanation: District Schools in Nineteenth-Century New England" in eds. Peter Benes, Jane Montague Benes, Ross W. Beales, *Families and Children: The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife: Annual Proceedings 1985* (Boston, Massachusetts: Boston University Press, 1985), 80.

expansive uses of literacy.”<sup>63</sup> Several laws were enacted that required compulsory education for both males and females.

### **Educational Development in Maine**

Educational development in Maine flourished later due to its relatively late settlement of English speakers, but followed similar patterns to the rest of New England. There were no established schools in the Province of Maine until 1701. Fifteen schools were established in Maine in the eighteenth-century.<sup>64</sup> Ava Harriet Chadbourne noted that the lack of educational development was due to the ravages of wars with the Native Americans, the treasury of the Province was virtually empty, transportation and communication were difficult due to and the area’s relative underdevelopment and isolation.<sup>65</sup> Aid in the eighteenth century from the British government, landholders and former inhabitants or their descendants provided for the protection of landholders, lessened of the depredations of Native Americans and provided representation of the district in the Massachusetts government.

The law of 1692 laid the responsibility of schools on the selectmen and inhabitants of the towns. According to the records, the town meetings in Maine towns were the most responsible for all the necessary acts for the establishment of schools. The practice of electing school masters was often done in town meetings with the approbation of the minister. Schools were frequently “moving schools” and changed residencies depending on the time of year. Samuel Eliot Morison examined the educational and religious culture of colonial New England. He remarked,

If secularization be progress, the New Englanders took an important step in advance by placing their schools under the control of the communities and commonwealths, and by insisting that the schoolteachers be laymen. If diffusion

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<sup>63</sup> Monaghan, *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*, 195.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> Ava Harriet Chadbourne, *A History of Education in Maine: a Study of a Section of American Educational History* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: The Science Press Printing Company, 1936), 11-13.

of education be progress, New England again deserves credit for making her education in many places free as well as public.<sup>66</sup>

He commented that by 1672 all settled areas in New England, with the exception of Rhode Island had a compulsory education law. There were very few private schools in the seventeenth-century and the only town with any written records was Boston. He further argued, “These schools were in no sense church schools, but in every contemporary sense of the word *public* schools, and their continued existence through two centuries provided the basis, a century ago, for the American system of free public education for all.”<sup>67</sup> He ultimately argued that Puritan education and religious practices were a top-down phenomenon dominated by spiritual and secular leaders. Funds for the schools were raised through taxation however; control of the schools most often lay with a precinct or parish. Public schooling was available for all, but led by the spiritual leader of a town.

The American Revolution greatly affected educational development. From the end of the Revolution until 1820, 195 towns were incorporated, fifty of which were incorporated in the first ten years, including Blue Hill.<sup>68</sup> Newer towns began to establish schoolhouses while older neighborhoods focused on improving the curriculum and funding. The act of the year 1800 gave power to the town to appoint committees who would design as well as select the location of schools. Most of these committees were created to investigate finances, “agree with the schoolmaster,” build schoolhouses or redistrict the town. The most important reason to establish a committee was to visit the schools, “to inspect its work and see if the qualifications of the

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<sup>66</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, 8th edition (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 59.

<sup>67</sup> Monaghan, 108.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45 and 52.

teacher were desirable” and to “draw up a plan for the betterment of the school.”<sup>69</sup> The minister was often the leader of such committees and he, “so often by his great zeal and interest encouraged the citizens to undertake much in the cause of education.”<sup>70</sup>

### **Fisher’s College Years**

Fisher was already actively engaged in learning and teaching before he became a minister in Blue Hill, Maine. He first mentioned teaching at a school in December 1787. He remarked that he was engaged to teach in Dedham, Massachusetts, for three months at three dollars a month with his board, which he considered, “low wages, but not so low as they would seem at present day (1815), the value of money being now much depreciated in comparison with what it then was.”<sup>71</sup> He noted that he opened the school days in prayer and taught writing and arithmetic tolerably well. He claimed to be embarrassed by his inadequate handwriting and thus labored to improve it. His only other criticism of his first teaching experience was that he “laid aside the distinction of master and scholar, and joined too much with the older student in their amusements.”<sup>72</sup> Fisher closed his first school in March 1788 and resumed his studies of Virgil, Tully, and the Greek and Latin languages as well as his interest in making bird cages.

Fisher taught at several other schools throughout his college career. In January 1790 he “engaged a horse to go to Wilton, New Hampshire to teach a school.”<sup>73</sup> His school began with sixteen students and ended with forty-six in February 1790. He quickly began another school in the area with nineteen scholars and ended after two weeks with between thirty and forty students. He received in total \$5.50 from his five weeks in Wilton, New Hampshire.<sup>74</sup> He opened a school

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<sup>69</sup> W.W. Stetson, *History of Education and the Evolution of the Present School System in Maine* (Augusta, Maine: Maine State Department of Education, 1910).

<sup>70</sup> Chadbourne, 127.

<sup>71</sup> Fisher and Smith, 12.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Fisher and Smith, 35.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

once again in Wilton in December 1790 and closed the school on February 12, 1791 after teaching between forty and fifty students. He received fourteen dollars for his services.

Fisher's final stint in Wilton was in the winter of 1792. His previous school-keeping records were erratic at best. He often only remarked when he opened and closed the school. He was a far more diligent record-keeper in his fourth experience as a schoolmaster in Wilton. He recorded the number of students who attended each day, which varied between twelve to forty-five pupils. He also hosted a number of competitions and exhibitions. On January 28 his student James B. Gray won a prize for a "little book."<sup>75</sup> On February 17 he, "had an exhibition; began with the lowest class in reading and spelling and proceeded to the highest. Showed up their writing. In the upper class a spelling match; every word spelt. Speaking. Music. Closed with prayer."<sup>76</sup>

Fisher next taught in Woodburn, Massachusetts, in December 1792 and January 1793. He repeatedly recorded the number of students that attended each day and gave the reader a deeper glimpse into the inner workings of the school. On December 31 he, "wrote rules for my school."<sup>77</sup> He was forced to close the school four times due to want of wood. On January 27 he "painted pieces for prizes for my scholars. Had occasion to punish one of them."<sup>78</sup> Fisher does not describe the crime or punishment, but this is the first mention of any need for discipline. He criticized the school for lack of corporal punishment and remarked, "This very circumstance occasioned more such punishment to be needful than usual in the schools I have kept. 'He that spareth the rod spoileth the child'. After all modern refinements, tis ancient maxim with stand

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 111.



good.”<sup>79</sup> The school was abruptly closed due to lack of town funds, and he received twenty four dollars.<sup>80</sup>

Fisher was next engaged as a schoolmaster in Brookline, Massachusetts. His first school opened in March 1793 and lasted for three weeks. He mentioned nothing about the school except his payment of nine dollars.<sup>81</sup> He opened a school in Brookline again in December 1793 and frequently remarked that he taught between twenty to fifty scholars. This is also is first mention of his school being visited by what we can only presume was a school board or local pastor. He was also injured this day due to a rogue snowball and commented, “Youth should be cautious how they sport.”<sup>82</sup> He noted that one of the members of the visiting committee was greatly angered by the incident and insisted on punishing the student. His school was visited once more before its closure in April 1794; however, he does not offer any details of the visitation. He received \$48 for four months and left soon after to begin his long career in Blue Hill, Maine.

Fisher’s college career was typical of the period. A moving school was an institution that would shift from town to town every couple of weeks. Schools terms therefore only lasted about six to twelve weeks. Moving schools were widespread in early America, especially in more isolated areas. Schools could also be unexpectedly cancelled if funding was cut. Monaghan remarked that tangible rewards such as the “little book” were incredibly common.<sup>83</sup> Fisher’s embarrassment over his handwriting was also normal. Monaghan argued that by the 1760s, better quality handwriting was expected from students.<sup>84</sup> The colonies had become more affluent and therefore could spend more money on learning handwriting. Writing materials and stationary

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>84</sup> Monaghan, 287.

were also more widely available. The most important job of a writing master was to teach mathematics and bookkeeping. Writing was essential to those two fields. He would therefore have been expected to be an expert in handwriting, and therefore in mathematics. His days as a schoolmaster were over, but his passion for education had only just begun.

### **Education in the Home**

Education within the home was just as important as formal education in Blue Hill and the neighboring towns. Fisher constantly encouraged his children to read. Group reading was an integral aspect of the Fisher household and provided a way to socialize with one another and listen to the reverend's theological beliefs. Group and solitary reading were a way for the women in the household to form their own identities. Historian Mary Kelley argued that women read the biographies of exemplary Christians in order to better improve themselves. Fisher often selected the books of pious men and women so that his children would learn to model their behavior after them. He had a large library and left numerous books to his children upon their marriages and in his will. His daughter Dolly Fisher had fifty of her own books and magazines when she married Robert Crosset in 1830.<sup>85</sup> Thirty of these books were gifted to her by her father on her wedding day. He gave his daughter Betsey several books when she got married including Hannah More's *Strictures on the Modern System of Education, with a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank and Conduct*, Rev. John Bennet's *Letters to a Young Lady: On a variety of useful and interesting subjects: calculated to improve the heart, to form manners and enlighten the understanding*, a youth primer, essays on baptism, the first volume on *New York*

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<sup>85</sup> Dorothea Fisher Crossett to Nancy Fisher Kitteridge, On the subject of "going to housekeeping", April 12, 1831, quoted in Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier*, 158.

*Miss Magazine* and the first volume of an unnamed book of sermons. He also gifted her three natural history paintings.<sup>86</sup>

When Jonathan and Dolly Fisher both passed away, their children received numerous books through the will. Josiah Fisher received his father's *Hebrew Lexicon*, other religious works and Bibles, two volumes of the *Telemachy* and the first four books of the *Odyssey*. His sisters Dolly and Mary received around thirty books apiece including several religious tracts, Pascal's *Thoughts*, Jedidiah Morse's *American Gazetteer*, a Latin Dictionary, a Bible, historical texts such as the history of Worcester County, Massachusetts, periodicals like *The Maine Gazette* and a number of their father's writings. Willard received eight books including *The Life of Rev. Rowland Hill*, a biography of Harriet Newell, a dictionary and a concordance.

Fisher also boarded aspiring ministers and those who wished to benefit from his instruction. This was a common practice throughout colonial New England and one the Fishers continued well into their old age.<sup>87</sup> He recorded Vespasian Ellis recited for two hours both morning and night on July 3, 118. Joshua Wood recited for one hour the same day and continued until August 7 when he finished reading the third book of the *Aeneid*. Fisher "cleared out [the] study" the following August so that Wood could continue with his recitations of the *Aeneid*. Wood stopped his education when he married Fisher's daughter Sally.

Nancy Fisher married Hosea Kitteridge who had boarded intermittently with the Fishers. Kitteridge had studied with Fisher and served as a preceptor of the Blue Hill Academy. Fisher had even purchased a work by Cicero for Kitteridge in 1822. He studied at Amherst College in 1826 where he purportedly also taught "fifty scholars most of them under fourteen years of age." He taught his pupils subjects he had learned from Fisher such as philosophy, astronomy,

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<sup>86</sup> Fisher and Weren, 574.

<sup>87</sup> Jane C. Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 34.

geometry, arithmetic and rhetoric. He studied at Andover Theological College and was ordained in 1832. Kitteridge maintained both a sentimental and intellectual relationship with his father-in-law throughout his life. Dolly's husband Robert Crosset was also a student of Fishers and attended the Bangor Theological Seminary in the 1820s. Crosset respected and trusted his father-in-law and was inspired to attend the Seminary that Fisher helped to found.

The Fishers also housed several of their grandchildren and other extended relatives of aspiring young pupils. Betsey sent her rather unruly stepson Ignatius Stevens to her father's home in 1823. He boarded alongside another young boy, Reuben Daniel, whose origins are unknown. Both boys "tarried hours on end" when given assignments and Fisher feared he had a negative influence on his step-grandson. Fisher remarked, "Ignatius we think sometimes does a little better, then returns to the bad way. I frequently give him good instructions, but if the mercy of God does not interpose, I know not what will become of him."<sup>88</sup> Ignatius continued his education at the Fisher's until his teen years and eventually went to sea like his father. Reuben Daniels fled from the Fisher's home and never compensated them for their efforts.

Joseph Stevens was later sent to his step-grandparents' home and also proved to be rather difficult. Fisher referred to him as "unmanageable zebra" and complained about his irreverence in church, his use of profanity and his lack of attention to his studies. He had faith that Joseph could be improved and remarked that his "hardened though not entirely seared conscience through severe chastisement, accompanied by calm and serious admonition may be touched and softened."<sup>89</sup> Joseph eventually also became a sailor. Betsey's natural children seemed more

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<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Fisher to Dorothea Fisher Stevens, December 28, 1824) quoted in Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier*, 162.

<sup>89</sup> Jonathan Fisher to Jeremiah Stevens, June 1828, quoted in Chase, *Jonathan Fisher, Maine Parson: 1768 to 1847*, 164.

interested in education. Her daughter Nancy attended an academy in Conway, New Hampshire and her son Augustus went to a Mr. Abbott's school in Westford, Massachusetts.

### **The Local Schoolhouse**

The local schoolhouses were as much centers of politics and religion as they were of education. The institution would have been one of the few buildings that all members of the community could access freely. Fisher's first experience with education at Blue Hill was at a singing school in 1799. He later "preached a lecture at the schoolhouse by Mr. Hales" on January 12, 1800.<sup>90</sup> He recorded preaching to a crowd of adults at least twenty-six times between 1799 and 1835, attending a prayer, singing, or temperance meeting, sitting through lectures, attending unnamed meetings, and attending a town meeting all within the walls of various schoolhouses.<sup>91</sup> The schoolhouse would have been the center of the community in Blue Hill in the early nineteenth-century. Education, whether through prayer, singing, politics, or secular lectures, would have influenced all those who passed through the doors of the schoolhouse.

Fisher was a member and fervent supporter of the Blue Hill Female Tract Society, the Society of Educating Young Men, the Society of Aid to Foreign Missions, the Hancock Singing Society, the Sunday School Society, and The Temperance Society and was a member of the Board of Trustees for the Blue Hill Academy and the Maine Charity School or Bangor Theological Society. Kevin D. Murphy contended that Fisher would have needed to emphasize his position as an education and religious authority in order to retain his social status in the community. Fisher's activity in these various societies and boards would have likely cemented his importance in education. Donald M. Scott argued that a minister's authority was increasingly questioned by his congregation in the late eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Fisher's

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>91</sup> This estimate is from my own personal calculations.

involvement would have solidified his relevancy in the community and position as an expert in education.

Jonathan Fisher was a great advocate of personal education and improvement. He actively contributed books to his neighbors, the church and school libraries. He finished transcribing verses for Mrs. Phineas Osgood on February 25, 1803. He distributed books to the lower classes in Blue Hill in November 1804. He made a bookcase for the Church library in April of that same year. He bound a book for a Mr. Flood and pasted two hundred and thirty-five covers for constitutions for the Female Tract Society in October 1806. He delivered a copy of the work *Sacred Geography* to Mr. Whitman for the Blue Hill library on May 14, 1813.<sup>92</sup> He bound several spelling, cipher and writing books for his own children and students at the local schools. He gave a Mrs. Jeremy Lane a primer in September 1823 and repaired maps bound a singing book and rebound an *Aesop's Fables* for a J.T. Stevens in January 1829. He demonstrated that he was passionate about education on a regional, municipal, and personal level. He did not simply desire for people to join societies or to attend schools, but was deeply concerned about fostering an individual love of learning.

### **Jonathan and Dolly Fisher in Blue Hill**

Once settled in Blue Hill, Maine, in 1796, Fisher's wife Dolly established a school with only four scholars and Fisher quickly started to catechize the local children. There is no further mention of Dolly's school; however, he noted he hurt his back while trying to raise a schoolhouse in February 1799. In September, "A man by the name of Henry Wilson came to me

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<sup>92</sup> Fisher does not specify an author but it was likely a work Elijah Parish which had been released the same year he donated the book. Elijah Parish, *Sacred geography, or, A gazetteer of the bible: Containing, in alphabetical order, a geographical description of all the countries, kingdoms, nations and tribes of men, with all the villages, towns, cities, provinces, hills, mountains, rivers, lakes, seas, and islands, mentioned in the sacred scriptures, or Apocrypha, including an account of the religion, government, population, fulfilment of prophecies, and present condition of the most important places.* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1813).

for approbation to keep school.”<sup>93</sup> He occasionally served as a substitute teacher at various schools in the region. He taught at the academy in Casting for a Mr. Bowers for two days 1810.<sup>94</sup> He also watched over the Morris and Stanford “grammers” on October 19, 1812.<sup>95</sup> The location of these “grammers” is largely unknown, as they are not ever mentioned as Blue Hill schools and no other location is associated with them. His last act of substitution occurred on January 1, 1824 at the “Beech School” in Blue Hill. <sup>96</sup>

Fisher may have not been as active in the classroom as he was while serving as a schoolmaster in Massachusetts, but he was not entirely absent. Ava Harriet Chadbourne insisted that ministers were crucial in the educational development of Maine towns. She remarked,

It was the minister who gave a strong and lasting influence to education; and although it was most often the classics and higher academic branches that he taught, still he was often the elementary school master or gave private lessons in the English branches when needed. It was with the minister that young men or women going out to teach found an opportunity to study grammar or some other new subject in which they needed instruction.<sup>97</sup>

Fisher would visit the local schools in order to assure that they were performing to his standards, offer catechism lessons to the young pupils and approve of potential schoolteachers.

Patricia Demers defined the catechism as, “a defense of memorized, prefabricated answers than an investigation of the interaction of voice and intelligence in a process that often precedes the acquisition of formal literacy.”<sup>98</sup> The catechism, no matter the form, was a springboard for more advanced or interpretative expressions. A catechism contained a creed and the Decalogue, otherwise known as the Ten Commandments. A teacher asked a set of questions while the student replied with a litany of determined answers. Even though it was a restricted

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 239.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 632.

<sup>97</sup> Chadbourne, 92-93.

<sup>98</sup> Patricia Demers, *Heaven Upon Earth: the Form of Moral and Religious Children's Literature to 1850* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1993), 53.

conversation, it was nonetheless a dynamic conversation which nurtured a sympathetic relationship between teacher and learner. Catechisms emphasized the duality of choices, the feasibility of Biblical models, and the inherent drama of exchange between teacher and student. Although Fisher does not record what occurred during his catechism lessons, it likely paralleled the experiences Demers described.

Fisher's first documented catechism lesson occurred on September 19, 1800, when he "attended catechizing of the children in the schoolhouse on Beech Hill."<sup>99</sup> Catechism was most often, but not exclusively, a summer activity. It was far more difficult to reach outlying families when the weather was foul than when it was pleasant and the roads were clear. He catechized children at the Beech Hill school house in 1800 and 1801, the pupils at the Blue Hill School from 1804 to 1811, the children of James Candage and Peter Parker, Jr. in 1804, the pupils under Phineas Osgood, Jr., and a Mr. Sinclair's tutelage in 1810, the schoolhouse in Sedgewick and Mr. Faulkner's student's in 1811, and the students at the Blue Hill Academy from 1813-1815. He visited fewer homes and schools after his fiftieth birthday and catechized only at Mr. Dodge's school at the "head of the bay" in 1817, in the homes of children in the town of Penobscot and Asa Clough's school in 1819, the home of Captain Means in 1821, Mr. Raundy's home in 1823, at the home of Peter Powers in 1832. Fisher also catechized at other undisclosed locations.<sup>100</sup>

Fisher frequently visited the local schools in order to evaluate their performances. He never remarked about the progress of these individual institutions in his journal, however, he did mention who he visited. The first teacher he visited was Lidia Parker on August 19, 1805.<sup>101</sup> He next mentioned visiting the schoolhouses of a Mr. Coggins and Mr. Dodge in 1815. He visited

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<sup>99</sup> Fisher and Weren, 90.

<sup>100</sup> These undisclosed locations were mentioned in August 1803, December 1804, September 1818, and August 1819.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 185.



the local schools far more often in the 1820s. He visited the institution at “the head of the bay” in 1822 and 1826, all the schools in Blue Hill in March 1824, the students at Hewin’s school in 1826, the “school in the village” or Blue Hill school in 1829.

### **Fisher’s Approval**

Fisher was the first to approve of any teacher that wished to practice in Blue Hill. This was an activity he began during his first few months in town and continued until his journal ended in 1834. He approved of Samuel Wood in 1805, Williams Hutchins in December 1810, Isaac S. Osgood in 1814, Phineas Pillsbury and Asa Candage in 1817, Suzey Carlet in May 1824, Rosanna Myrick in May 1825, John Arnold in 1827, a Mr. Crosset in September 1829, Julia Ann Tenney, Emma Osgood and Mary Shepherdson in 1832, Mary Hayden and Jed Darling, Jr. in May 1833, and Ellen Hinckley on July 11, 1834. He even rejected a Mrs. M. Gray of Sedgewick on June 26, 1832, but does not state a reason for her denial. Several of these teachers followed their own parents as teachers such as Isaac and Emma Osgood and Asa Candage. A number of these potential educators were from the broader Penobscot region and wished to transplant to Blue Hill.

Fisher often visited schoolhouses to preach about Biblical matters. His favorite topics included obedience, trusting in God, the threat of dying in sin and the availability of Scripture. These are incessant themes in juvenile works of the period. There was an incredible fear that children would die with knowing the love of God. Pastors would therefore threaten death and destruction in order to convince children to repent and embrace Christianity. They tried to convince children to trust in God and ask for forgiveness. John Locke had argued that children were like “blank slates” nevertheless, an assumption endured that all human beings were burdened by sin, including children. Ministers also regularly preached to children about

obedience to their parents and elders. Dutiful children were expected to listen to all authorities including the Bible. Ministers continuously encouraged children to read the Scripture for themselves. This can partly explain Fisher and other spiritual leaders' emphasis upon education. How was a child to dutifully study the Scriptures if they were unable to read? How could a person become a forgiven Christian if they were incapable of reading the Word of God? Historian Lockridge believed that this fear of the consequences of sin spurred early American New England Protestants to teach children how to read. He further argued that this dedication to education was the reason New England's literacy rates were so much higher than other parts of the North American continent.

Fisher's first recorded religious lecture outside of the church occurred on December 11, 1823 and concerned human depravity. In 1824 he lectured at the school of Captain Wood about depravity, repentance, faith and from 2 Timothy 3:15 and 2 Kings 18:12. He visited the school of Phineas Osgood on April 20, 1827 and preached about obedience to God and to one's elders. In 1829 he preached to the children at the "brick school" about the Holy Scripture from Psalm 119:11, at the "village school" from John 3:30 and to Mr. Day's school from Psalm 119 and 140 about the purity and the availableness of Scripture. He visited Captain Wood's school again in 1832 and preached from Jeremiah 13:23. The remainder of his references to religious lectures was more general and did not contain specific Bible verses or school locations. He also enjoyed lecturing parents about the importance of juvenile religious education.<sup>102</sup> He spoke to the parents on October 29, 1826 and April 8, 1827 specifically about the matter of religious education; however, he did not include any details of the lecture.<sup>103</sup> He once again spoke to the community

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<sup>102</sup> Fisher speaks of these lectures in general terms and never identifies specific locations. One can assume these possibly occurred at his Congregational church or at the school houses where the students he lectured attended.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 754 and 774.

on October 12, 1828 about a parent's religious connection to their children.<sup>104</sup> These lectures often occurred concurrently with his addresses to the youth.

### **Sunday Schools**

Sunday schools were first established in order to reach poor children that were not receiving an education otherwise. By 1830 these types of school had been replaced by a new type of Sunday school which was taught by volunteers emphasizing a specifically evangelical Protestant curriculum that was incredibly successful. Larger towns and cities in the Northeast were usually more receptive to Sunday schools than rural areas or in the South. Sunday schools did provide lessons in literacy, but were more importantly a source of Protestant ideals for children who were not getting them elsewhere. For girls, illiterate adults, African Americans, factory children, and frontier residents, Sunday schools served in the absence of publicly funded or weekday schooling opportunities. Teachers supplemented their curriculum with their denominational theology and training in their church's history and rituals. Sunday schools became the only institution which could correct moral "deficiencies" as the common schools became more secular. Memorization was the key teaching tool and religious educators also created libraries in order to disseminate evangelical children's literature.

As Sunday schools developed into fortresses of religious education, their curriculum also became more spiritual in nature. Sunday schools emphasized understanding the Bible over rote memorization. This pattern is also seen in Fisher's curriculum choices. When Fisher moved to Blue Hill in the late 1790s, he used the catechism to teach children about Protestantism. Catechisms typically called upon teachers to ask a set of pre-determined questions and for students to respond with standardized answers. Sunday schools placed little emphasis on the catechism. In the 1820s and 1830s during the advent of Sunday schools, Fisher began to offer

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 806.

more lectures instead of catechism lessons. Fisher, similar to the Sunday schools, appeared more concerned about a person's relationship with God than whether they were able to recite the catechism.

Thanks to the new curriculum in the 1830s and 1840s, teachers more often than not focused on children from "church-families" as opposed to children from lower classes. There was generally less concentration on outreach. Most children in the mission schools attended out of choice and remained because of its opportunities. Those children who disliked it "voted with their feet."<sup>105</sup> She insisted in her work that evangelical Protestantism may be seen as connected with the middle-class vision of expanding the economy and democracy. According to Boylan, social-control is not a process of coercion but of transmitting cultural values. Sunday schools therefore became an institution because they promised to transmit these cultural values. She stated, "the importance of institutions can be measured as much by their ability to maintain social order, promote social cohesion, and enforce social control as by their longevity."<sup>106</sup> Boylan concluded that "The evangelical Sunday school not only helped to define childhood and shape its contours, it mediated the meaning of religious experience to millions of youngsters."<sup>107</sup> Patricia Demers concurs that great faith was placed in education as a means of moral formation and reformation as well as in a child's capacity and malleability. Unlike Boylan however, Demers insisted that religious schooling encouraged discipline, while also fostering individuality. The reality was that children could be wild or well-behaved. She argued, "Although the treatises on Charity and Sunday school education are full of regulations to mold orderly and order-obeying pupils, publications that appeared from the late eighteenth century on in astounding numbers to

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<sup>105</sup> Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1889* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988), 135.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

serve a growing literate population and especially a younger readership, allowed for more individual expressivity and difference.”<sup>108</sup>

The Sabbath School Society of Blue Hill was formed on May 10, 1827 and several of the local schools developed their own Sunday schools. There was an American Sunday School Union; however, these Blue Hill schools appear to have developed independently from this national institution. There is no record of when the first Sunday school in Blue Hill was established. Fisher examined his first Sunday school in the home of Asa Clough on October 28, 1827. He attended the Sunday school lesson at the “brick school” in 1831 and 1832, and the school of Phineas Osgood in 1831. He even spent time with his neighbors Faulkner and Gilpatrick on June 11, 1832 to select suitable books for the Sunday schools.<sup>109</sup> He was not a teacher in the Sunday schools, but as the leading minister in his community, he offered guest lectures and helped to select appropriate curriculum. He unfortunately did not disclose which books were selected and no other records hint at the agreed upon selection. Although Boylan that Sunday schools were popular, Fisher does not excessively dwell on their existence or function in his journal. Whether the schools in Blue Hill were highly disciplined or allowed for more individuality is open for debate. He appeared more interested in supporting public education and developing secular curriculum. He spoke far more often about local schools than he did of Sunday schools. He was perhaps inspired by the Sunday school movement to further abandon rote memorization; however, he is quiet about their influence over his life and the community.

## **Conclusion**

Fisher’s experiences as a teacher and student were quite common; however, his passion for learning and confidence in secular and religious knowledge were unique. He catechized

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<sup>108</sup> Demers, 41.

<sup>109</sup> Fisher and Weren, 941.

children and lectured upon Biblical matters, but he also encouraged students to read works such as Virgil and Homer. He perhaps did not greatly dwell on the Sabbath Schools in Blue Hill, because he felt that their curriculum was compatible with the material being offered in other schools.

Nancy Fisher Kitteridge confessed that she wished she could be back in her father's office studying devotions and muses. Fisher taught his daughter to not be intimidated by secular works because Christianity was the ultimate authority. Nancy read works on metaphysics, collected books, and named her son Pascal while remaining a strong Christian and minister's wife and daughter. Fisher shared his Enlightenment Christianity with his family, boarders, students, and schools.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE FOUNDATION AND PROMOTION OF THE BLUE HILL ACADEMY AND BANGOR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

#### **Introduction**

Secondary education, or education aimed at students between the ages of twelve and eighteen, was crucial for children who desired to go to college or to enhance the lessons they received from primary education or from their homes. The Blue Hill Academy (1803) educated ambitious students, while the Bangor Theological Seminary (1814) trained young men interested in ministry. Both institutions incorporated secular and religious curriculum. Fisher was an advent supporter of the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary. He demonstrated that he not only desired for students to learn the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic, but to strive for higher levels of learning. He insisted that a better understanding of science, history, and philosophy could lead to a greater comprehension of God.

#### **Establishment of the Blue Hill Academy**

Latin grammar schools were popular elsewhere in the eighteenth-century, but not necessarily in Maine, where only seven towns boasted a grammar school before the Revolution. Earliest secondary education law, the “old deluder law” was passed in 1647 and required that all towns with over 100 people establish a Latin grammar school or would be fined five pounds for neglect. The law of 1789 replaced the previous law and required towns of 200 people to support a twelve month grammar school that would teach Latin, Greek and English. Twenty-five grammar schools were established between 1785 and 1820. Blue Hill Academy was the ninth to be founded. The Washington Academy was the first one established in Washington and Hancock

counties, and was incorporated into the town of Machias. Castine and Blue Hill both vied for an academy at the same time however, Blue Hill received its academy first.<sup>110</sup>

This process began with a petition to the governor by the most influential men in town, once money had been raised by subscription for the academy. A petition was signed by Ebenezer Floyd and thirty-one other Blue Hill residents, because they “felt it to be a duty imposed upon them by the author of their being to established, foster, and perpetuate an institution in the interest of piety, virtue, morality, and intelligence, that their children might not be brought up like unto the heathen.”<sup>111</sup> They agreed by their signatures,

to erect an academy building in the town of Blue Hill, on a spot already agreed upon for the purpose, the building to be 38 feet long, 30 feet wide, the first story 11 feet and the second 10 feet high, of sound timber-pine, spruce or hemlock- to be framed in a work-man-like manner, set up at vendue and struck off to the lowest bidder.

They divided the capital stock into one hundred shares of \$5.00 each and bound themselves to, “maintain the school for a period of ten years and to provide a preceptor suitable in every respect for such an institution.”<sup>112</sup> The petition was passed around throughout 1802 and 1803 and Fisher signed this petition.

John Peters was the treasurer of the newly-organized board and was charged with presenting the petition to the General Court.<sup>113</sup> After the petition was granted through an act of incorporation, the land was received and a building was constructed. The subscribers were often included in board meetings. Ten days after its incorporation, the subscribers met at the schoolhouse on Beech Hill. On the following day they convened and appointed a committee of Theodore Stevens, Jonathan Ellis and Andrew Witham to superintend the erection of the building

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<sup>110</sup> Edward Lyon Linscott, “The History of Secondary Education in Washington and Hancock Counties in Maine” in *The Maine Bulletin*, Volume XXXIX, Number 12, (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, May 1937), 25.

<sup>111</sup> *Petition for incorporation of Blue Hill Academy*, extract from *Ellsworth American*, 1885.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Committee For a Greater Stevens Academy, *The Academies of Blue Hill, Maine, 1802-1952*, (1952), 2.



and it was also voted that the building stand on the land belonging to Theodore Stevens, opposite of Daniel Spofford's home on the north side of the road. A meeting five days later moved the completion of the building up to the first Monday of July and it was also voted, "to set up at vendue the frame of the academy... Frame to be of sound timber- pine, spruce, or hemlock. To be framed in a workmanlike manner by the plan accepted by the subscribers."<sup>114</sup> As means to immediately finance it, they voted that each subscriber pay one dollar more monthly starting April 1 which equaled \$32 in 1804, \$178.10 later in the year, \$500 in March 1805 and \$200 on the same date but a different tax.<sup>115</sup>

It was completed in April 1803 at the recorded cost of \$1407.25.<sup>116</sup> This preparation was usually followed by a dedication sermon and a feast. Fisher preached at its dedication on April 5, 1803. The first recorded meeting of the Board of Trustees of the Blue Hill Academy occurred in May 1804 and then in June of that same year. There is no record of meetings in 1805, but he seemed to meet with the board frequently in 1806. The trustees met five times in 1806. The trustee meetings seem to develop a more regular schedule thereafter with board members meeting between one to four times a year.

Historian Edward Lyon Linscott argued that "the establishment of this early academy....was the result of the concerned efforts of men interested not only in local affairs but also in matters concerning the welfare of the entire country."<sup>117</sup> The Board of Trustees included General David Cobb, John Peters, Reverend David Thurston, Jonathan Buck, Thomas Cobb Esquires, Reverend Jonathan Fisher, Reverend William Mason, Reverend Jonathan Powers, Robert Parker Theodore Stevens, Donald Ross, and John Peters, Jr.

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Linscott, 29.

<sup>116</sup> *The Academies of Blue Hill, Maine*, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Linscott, 28.

General David Cobb was one of the most prestigious men in the Province of Maine. He had studied medicine at Harvard, was a senator and chief justice, and held a number of other political positions in Massachusetts and Maine. John Buck was a representative from the general court of Buckstown which is now known as Bucksport. John Peters, Theodore Stevens and Robert Parker were all prominent and influential men in Blue Hill. David Thurston was a Congregational minister and missionary from Massachusetts. William Mason was a Unitarian pastor from Castine, and John Powers were a Congregational minister from Penobscot. Fisher was the chairman of the board for several years and one of its most enthusiastic members. Linscott remarked,

The zeal and persistent efforts of the Rev. Mr. Fisher aided Blue Hill materially in securing the coveted institution. He lent his strength and uncommon accomplishment to the establishment and fostering of the school for the education of the youth of this section, and when, in 1803 the Academy was ready to go into operation, to him was entrusted the well-earned privilege of delivering the dedicatory address.<sup>118</sup>

The Board of Trustees raised funds for the academy through subscriptions. There were one hundred shares issued and there appeared no problem in getting the necessary number of subscribers. Each subscriber was to be taxed no more than 6.5 cents per year for fifteen years. Those on the subscription list believed “that the academy under proper regulation would be of great public utility to the rising generation in this part of the country in leading youth into the paths of piety and virtue in pursuit of most useful knowledge.”<sup>119</sup>

Doctor Tappan of Cambridge was asked to find a suitable teacher but he claimed to not be able to find a candidate. Mr. William Frothingham, who had been preaching in Gorham, was engaged for six dollars a week for six months. Elias Upton was his successor and he had graduated from Harvard in 1802 and at the time was in Pepperlborough, Maine. Upton served for

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 28.

thirteen years. “To undertake this monstrous assignment came Elias Upton, the trustees having made it known throughout the county that he was ‘eminently qualified’ and they invited ‘those who wish to give their children a handsome education’ to ‘encourage this infant institution by sending their tender offspring to taste the sweets of literature.’”<sup>120</sup> Upton was a prestigious citizen and served as the town representative in the General Court in 1813, 1815 and 1816. He was considered a good disciplinarian, despite the fact that when the trustees visited, “two boys were remiss in the payment of fines for damage to school property,” “three others were admonished to submit carefully to the orders of the school, or leave it” and it was necessary to lecture on the “passing of billets and other papers for amusement and disturbance.” Upton was followed by a Mr. Bailey of who little is known. Several other teachers were engaged at the Blue Hill Academy. In 1804 an unnamed preceptress taught the girls. She received for her services, “passage to Blue Hill, her board and \$3.00 per week.”<sup>121</sup> Either she or an unnamed successor remained until at least 1830s.<sup>122</sup>

In 1805 a second teacher was engaged “in the art of sacred music.”<sup>123</sup> Money for this was appropriated from the town since the town engaged in singing schools. The preceptor was to open and close the Academy with daily scripture and prayer, classify the scholars, introduce newspapers and miscellaneous books of moral and religious character, instruct in the truths of Christianity and “keeping a bill of all absences,” “waiting in the Academy at night till the scholars are gone, and the fire is put into a situation of safety,” and the receiving of “applications of scholars.”<sup>124</sup> Saturday afternoon, Election Day, fast and thanksgiving days and July 4 were holidays. Sometimes a teacher would dismiss students early on Wednesday afternoons, “at the

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<sup>120</sup> *The Academies of Blue Hill, Maine*, 5.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>124</sup> Fisher and Weren, 48.

discretion of the preceptor after attention to exercises of declamation, composition, reading, and spelling.”<sup>125</sup>

Board meetings were frequently followed by visitations to the Academy. Fisher occasionally remarked upon the progress of the pupils. On October 29, 1811, he remarked that he “was pleased by samples of reading, speaking, needlework and painting.”<sup>126</sup> On April 21, 1817 he noted, “The pupils appeared very well except in reading and speaking too low.”<sup>127</sup> Fisher appeared to be quite proud of the Academy and sent all of his children to be schooled there. His children John, Sally and Betsey went to the Academy on December 21, 1812. Josiah and a boarding student Hosea Kitteridge started to attend the school in December 1820. Fisher accounted for all of his children’s education in February 1821. He stated, “Willard studies geography and writes at home. Has attended the Academy this winter seven weeks. Betsey, Josiah and Polly now attend Academy. Dolly feeble and Nancy works at home.”<sup>128</sup> Dolly and Polly went to school in December 1823. Willard attended the Academy in February 1825. He noted that Willard and Dolly attended the academy in February 1827. It should be noted that three of his daughter were employed as schoolteachers for a least a short duration while his eldest living son Josiah became an ordained minister. Sally Fisher taught school on Cranberry Isle in the summer of 1818, Castine in the winter of 1820, Orland in the summer of 1820, and in Eden in the summer of 1821. Betsey Fisher taught school in Eden alongside her sister. Dolly Fisher went farther than all of her sisters and taught in Paterson, New Jersey. Polly, Mary and Willard are not recorded as having served as teachers. His children did not offer any of their own educational philosophies, however, several of them remarked about their love of reading. Dolly

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<sup>125</sup> *The Academies of Blue Hill, Maine*, 5.

<sup>126</sup> Fisher and Weren, 271.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

bragged to her sister that she had a “bookcase [that] is quite large, but is well filled, having over 200 volumes, which the addition of my library of 50 volumes plus our periodical publications affords us reading enough for the present.”<sup>129</sup>

### Curriculum

There is one key pamphlet from 1831 allows clear insight to the Blue Hill Academy’s curriculum. It can be formatted as such:

Table 1: Blue Hill Curriculum

	Fall Term	Winter Term	Spring Term
First Year	Arithmetic, beginning with Interest. Geography, beginning with British America. Grammar, Advanced book Analysis & Composition. U.S. History, beginning at close of Revolution. Penmanship.	Arithmetic, completed. Geography, completed. Grammar, &c., cont. United States History. Penmanship.	Algebra. Physical Geography. Grammar, &c., cont. United States History, completed. Penmanship.
Second Year	Grammar, &c., cont. Physiology. Algebra. Physical Geography. Philosophy.	Grammar, &c., cont. Physiology, cont. Algebra, completed. Book-keeping. Philosophy.	Grammar, &c., completed. Physiology, completed. Geometry. Book-keeping, completed. Philosophy.
Third	Chemistry.	Chemistry.	Mineralogy &

<sup>129</sup> Dorothea Fisher Crossett to Nancy Fisher Kitteridge, On the subject of “going to housekeeping”, April 12, 1831, quoted in Murphy, *Jonathan Fisher of Blue Hill, Maine: Commerce, Culture and Community on the Eastern Frontier*, 158.

Year	Rhetoric & Composition. Geometry. Civil Government.	Rhetoric & Composition. Astronomy. Civil Government.	Geology. Rhetoric, completed. Astronomy. Botany.
Fourth Year	Political Economy. Botany. English Literature. Mineralogy & Geology.	Mental Philosophy. Natural History. English Literature. General History.	Arithmetic, reviewed. Natural History. English Literature. General History.

Reading and Spelling to continue through the course.

Latin, French or German to be elective for pupils who have the ability to take an additional study.<sup>130</sup>

There is little other documentation for the Academy during this period except for a few student notebooks from the 1810s. These include a financial arithmetic workbook by John G. Witham, who studied during the winter session of 1810-1811, a geometry notebook by Luther M. Stover, and several notebooks by Moses Pillsbury who studied at the academy on-and-off for several years. These notebooks indicate that students enrolled in mathematic courses that today would be dubbed as “business math,” that is, arithmetic that would be practical in business situations. Witham for example jotted down notes about Tare and Tret, or allowances made by selling goods by weight, fellowships or joint stocks, simple interest, and exchange rates between United States “Federal Money,” Great Britain, Ireland, Jamaica, Bermuda, Barbados, and the “English West Indies.”<sup>131</sup> Stover and Pillsbury studied square roots and decimals. Their world problems often involved distances between ships and buildings and other practical issues. Pillsbury, in particular, enjoyed drawing pictures that illustrated the equations.

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<sup>130</sup> *Course of Study- Blue Hill Academy and Free High School*, 1831. Archive Box 33. Blue Hill Public Library. Blue Hill, Maine.

<sup>131</sup> *Notebook of Jonathan G. Witham*, Blue Hill Academy, December 1810 to January 1811. Archive Box 33. Blue Hill Public Library. Blue Hill, Maine.

Most academies such as Blue Hill and Fryeburg, taught English, Latin, Greek and French languages, writing, arithmetic, speaking, geometry, logic, philosophy, geography, and other pertinent subjects. Maine academies were slightly different in student enrollment and subject matter than other New England grammar schools. Grammar schools, more generally usually served to prepare intelligent, well-to-do young men for a college education. Maine schools, however, were reluctant to enroll only college-bound boys and to maintain a solely classics curriculum. They generally desired a school “giving instruction in learned languages and other branches of Literature necessary for their appearance and action in public life.”<sup>132</sup> Maine grammar schools therefore enrolled young women and included a broader selection of subject matter. Although the surviving notebooks are all by male scholars, Fisher’s journals suggest that several young women, including his daughters, attended the Academy. We do not know whether they studied the “business math” that Witham, Stover, and Pillsbury recorded. Students who attended college were generally from more populated areas in New England. Those who lived on the frontier and desired an education realized that subjects such as “business math” were far more practical. In the twenty-first century students do not usually enroll in calculus courses if “business” math would be more useful. The same principle applied in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Higher level math or more abstract topics were not necessary for students becoming local businessmen.

A list of textbooks provided in the 1830s included the *Analytical Reader*, Colburn’s *Arithmetic*, Flint’s *Surveying*, Woodbridge’s *Geography and Atlas*, Wilkin’s *Astronomy*, *Conversations on Chemistry and Natural Philosophy* and books for Latin and parsing, that is, to

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<sup>132</sup> *Trustee’s Records of the Fryeburg Academy*, quoted in A.F Lewis, *Fryeburg Webster Centennial: Celebrating the Coming of Daniel Webster to Fryeburg 100 Years Ago to Take the Principalship of Fryeburg Academy*, (Fryeburg, Maine: 1902), Google Play Edition, 45.

dissect a sentence into parts and describe their syntactic roles. These textbooks are not altogether dissimilar from twenty-first century textbooks. Woodbridge's *Geography and Atlas*, for example, contains thematic chapters with relevant information. The chapters end with questions that students can individually answer or teachers can prompt students to answer. The chapters even offer advice to teachers to help students learn. Woodbridge advised with regards to a lesson in latitude, "The pupil must be careful to follow the curves of the parallel, as directed, pg. 20, or he will often mistake...The teacher may increase the number of examples, as he finds necessary to make the subject understood."<sup>133</sup> Colburn's *Arithmetic* follows a similar pattern. Students are offered information in different chapters and are given questions to answer at the end of the chapter. Teachers are advised that students should not proceed to the next concept unless they have a perfect understanding of their current lesson. Colburn directed,

To the teacher- Before proceeding further the student should become perfectly familiar with the figures given above. He should be able to both to know what they represent when he sees them and to write them neatly and distinctly. He should associate them in his mind with the numbers themselves rather than with the names of the numbers.<sup>134</sup>

In another section Colburn recommended, "The following questions may be illustrated by rows of dots or counters, as above."<sup>135</sup> Students were not expected to merely memorize answers or information, but to demonstrate an understanding of the lessons. Sunday school textbooks and Fisher's published works also demanded comprehension instead of memorization. Educators such as Fisher were concerned about the quality not the quantity of learning.

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<sup>133</sup> William C. Woodbridge, *Geography and Atlas*, (Hartford, Connecticut: O.D. Cooke, 1826), 32.  
<https://archive.org/details/rudimentsofgeogr00woodrich>.

<sup>134</sup> Warren Colburn. *Warren Colburn's First Lessons: Intellectual Arithmetic upon the Inductive Method of Instruction. Revised and Enlarged Edition*. (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin and Company: 1884), 17.  
<https://archive.org/stream/intellectualari00colbgoog#page/n35/mode/2up>.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 46.



The works mentioned in 1831 did not contain any religious content. Woodbridge's work was praised in the *American Journal of Science and Arts* as using, "the important principles of classification, in reducing geography to the form of a science, thus increasing the facility of acquiring and retaining its detail."<sup>136</sup> Fisher approved of this textbook, although it did not reference Christianity. Fisher was secure enough in his own faith and in his abilities as an educator, that he did not feel threatened by secular textbooks.

### **Fisher and the Academy**

Fisher served as an occasional disciplinarian. One February 28, 1821, he "gave warning to students against profanity."<sup>137</sup> In 1830, Blue Hill required forty weeks of school annually. The school years would start on the first Thursday in September and last for twelve week. It was followed by a two week vacation and then a term of sixteen weeks. This too ended with a two week vacation and was followed by a term of twelve weeks. In previous years school had been in operation for males 30-35 weeks and for girls 16-20 weeks. In Blue Hill students were required to "attend public worship on the Sabbath, also, on the usual Fasts and Thanksgivings and likewise it shall be recommended to them to attend lectures preparatory to the sacrament at which times they shall conduct themselves with the strictest propriety."<sup>138</sup> In the 1840s the laws were revised and the Bible was "to be read daily in school as the admitted standard of morality and God recognized as our Benefactor and Judge" and the teachers were to highlight "the principles of morality and Justice and a sacred regard to truth, love to their country."<sup>139</sup> Teachers were also allowed to expel students who they felt did not respect the school or their studies.

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<sup>136</sup> Benjamin Silliman, "Review of Woodbridge's *Geography and Atlas*", in *The American Journal of Science and Arts* (January 2, 1829), 357. ProQuest Edition. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/89590294?accountid=14583>.

<sup>137</sup> Fisher and Weren, 545.

<sup>138</sup> *The Academies of Blue Hill, Maine*, 5.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 and 8.

## **The Bangor Theological Seminary**

The Bangor Theological Seminary was founded by the Reverend Johnathan Sawyer and a group of Congregational ministers in 1814. They first met on July 27, 1811 but did not receive a charter until February 25, 1814. The Congregational ministers and lay leaders wanted to create a center of theological study in northern New England. Fisher argued, “I am strongly adverse to an unlearned ministry, but if in this district we wait to be supplied from other institutions, I am fully persuaded that the ground would be preoccupied by Sectarians, many of whom will not only be unlearned, but very unlearned.”<sup>140</sup> The school was to be modeled after the Haxton Academy in England. The curriculum was to include two years of Greek and Latin and would be followed by several years of systematic and pastoral theology, church history and preaching. The Seminary was able to open due to the donation of the Society for Theological Education and a group of women led by Abigail Goodhue Bayley of Newcastle.<sup>141</sup>

The school officially opened on October 11, 1816 and was led by Jehardi Ashman and later Abijah Wuis. The Seminary started with six students.<sup>142</sup> It remained open despite spotty funding largely due to the efforts of the Board of Trustees. Fisher was an ardent supporter and donated one hundred dollars in four years.<sup>143</sup>

The Seminary relocated to Bangor, Maine, due to a land donation from Isaac Davenport. The first building the “Chapel” was built largely by members of the Seminary. Reverend Johnathan Smith and Reverend Banecraft Fowler led the Seminary in its early years. The first year of study consisted of English, Latin, Greek, geography, composition and arithmetic. The

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<sup>140</sup> Quoted in “Bangor Theological Seminary, 170 Years Old”, *The Bangor Daily News*, June 28, 1984. Google News Edition. <https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2457&dat=19840628&id=0808AAAIBAJ&sjid=8i0MAAAIBAJ&pg=3405,6509690&hl=en>.

<sup>141</sup> Calvin Montague Clark, *History of the Bangor Theological Seminary*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Pilgrim Press, 1916), 13. Hathi Trust Digital Library edition. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001414469>

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 22.

second year was composed of geography, composition, math, rhetoric, logic, natural philosophy and other languages such as French or Hebrew. A student's final two years were dedicated to natural philosophy, metaphysics, theology, composition, the delivery of sermons and pastoral duties. Most of the Seminary graduates preached in Maine helping to fill the spiritual disaster area which was dominated by dissenters such as Baptists and Methodists. The Seminary experienced a bit of a crisis in 1820 due to a lack of professors. Enoch Pond was eventually hired in 1833 and helped the seminary to assume the shape it maintained into the twenty-first century. Pond helped to enrich the curriculum with a particular focus on Hebrew, Greek and exegesis or the critical interpretation of Scripture. He also divided the school by those who wanted to go to a seminary and those who wanted to go to college. Classical education was eventually abandoned in the 1850s once deemed unnecessary in comparison to religious obligations. This format continued throughout the nineteenth century, well after Jonathan Fisher's death.

Fisher first mentioned the Bangor Theological Seminary or "Maine Charity School," as it was initially named until 1886, in March and April 1815. The first Board of Trustees meeting was held on May 5, 1814 in the home of Major Samuel Moor in Montville. He noted that he met with the Board of Trustees to discuss the "school lot." This was likely a reference to its beginnings of the Hampden site. He also remarked that the Society voted to move the site from Hampden to Bangor on July 8, 1819

Fisher was particularly dismayed by his visit in March 1819. Gossip had been floating around Professor Ashman. Ashman was originally from New York and had escaped to Maine after an unsuccessful love affair. He had started to court a young, unnamed woman in Hampden. Ashman renewed his relationship with his former New York flame and created quite a scandal in the Penobscot region. Ashman and Wuis were unsuccessful in stifling the gossip. Fisher noted

that the trustees voted for the resignation of Professors Wuis and Ashman and invited Professors Thurston and Fowler to teach at the school instead. While at the Academy Fisher also tried to “subordinate” the students who had “wandered astray from their duties.”<sup>144</sup> The Board of Trustees met frequently in 1820. The new professors were inaugurated on March 8 during which Fisher noted, “Our Theological Institution appears to be flourishing, except that its funds are scanty.”<sup>145</sup> One anonymous author bragged to the *Boston Recorder* that five out of the six from the first graduating class had already become ministers in Maine.<sup>146</sup> The Board of Trustees examined the students in August and attended an exhibition by the junior class. The junior and senior classes in particular were examined on a near yearly basis. Fisher evaluated seminary students and attended their exhibitions in 1822, 1824 to 1827, 1829, and 1831 to 1833.<sup>147</sup>

The December 1825 visit was also incredibly eventful. The board had gathered to approve students to preach. Fisher “heard the four latter discourses; a confession of faith exhibited by the above. Named students. Each of them gave a reason of his hope. The evidence of their piety appeared to be satisfactory....A vote was passed to approbate them; a formal approbation was given them.”<sup>148</sup> During the board of trustees meeting, three members resigned while three were accepted. The meeting ended with a conference by a Mr. Lovejoy who spoke “of the fullness of Christ” and the establishment of a domestic missionary society.<sup>149</sup>

In September 1832, Fisher met with the association and heard six members of the senior class read theological discourses. The board also “examined them upon doctrinal subjects and

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<sup>144</sup> Fisher and Weren, 463.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 506.

<sup>146</sup> “Maine Theological Seminary”, *Boston Recorder*, Volume 7, Issue 48, November 30, 1822, <http://www.library.umaine.edu/auth/EZProxy/test/authej.asp?url=http://search.proquest.com.prxy4.ursus.maine.edu/docview/124129099?accountid=14583>

<sup>147</sup> These visits are recorded in his journals.

<sup>148</sup> Fisher and Weren, 709.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 709.

upon experimental religion during the evening.”<sup>150</sup> The following day the committee decided to fix the annual exhibition on the first Wednesday in August, the licensing of new preachers on the last Tuesday and Wednesday of December, and the spring examination for the third Wednesday in May. The committee continued to examine students until the eleventh of September.

Fisher was an active supporter of the Bangor Theological Seminary. Fisher noted that he solicited for subscriptions in October 1823 while visiting relatives in Massachusetts and while traveling throughout the Penobscot area in August 1829 and September 1831. He wrote a letter to a student Joseph Lane in November 1825 and transcribed a constitution for the Seminary in September 1831. Fisher does not discuss the contents of either of these documents; nevertheless, he was undoubtedly passionate about the Seminary and the students who attended. He wrote letters to students, attended their evaluations, and solicited subscriptions because he wanted to see the school and its students exceed and spread Congregationalism throughout New England.

Fisher was completely devastated when his son Josiah refused to attend the Bangor Theological Seminary. In 1822 Fisher had begun to plan for Josiah to attend the seminary, however, Josiah began to receive letters and books from his cousin Louisa Battle, in Massachusetts, who persuaded Josiah to attend a college farther south. Fisher stated, “Figuring [Josiah] now bent upon going to some western college, gave my mind a great shock, under which I can hardly bear up...For my son to go to another institution would seem to speak a language unfavorable to this and in this I find my heart is much bound.”<sup>151</sup> Josiah’s decision to attend a different school did not demonstrate confidence in the Bangor Theological Seminary. Fisher did not offer any further commentary on his son’s decision; however, it is likely he was devastated and embarrassed by his son’s lack of loyalty. Josiah’s choice would have possibly dissuaded

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 953.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 643.

others in the community from attending the seminary and eroded a bit of his father's spiritual authority in the community. Luckily, one of Fisher's son-in-laws, Robert Crossett attended the Seminary and became the first Congregational pastor in Dennysville, Maine. Crossett's actions hopefully restored some of Fisher's image in Blue Hill and earned Crossett his father-in-law's respect.

### **Conclusion**

Jonathan Fisher desired to educate future ministers and provide learning opportunities to all of the Penobscot area's youth. He did not find the Bible incompatible with secular works such as Wilkin's *Astronomy, Conversations on Chemistry and Natural Philosophy*. He approved of secular curriculum at the Blue Hill Academy and Bangor Theological Seminary. Like Pascal for whom his grandson was named, Fisher believed that faith is separate from and superior to reason. One could study every possible secular subject but still know little of God's providence without faith. According to Fisher, astronomy, chemistry and natural philosophy were not actual threats to one's faith. If one studied the sciences or other subject matter one could better understand God. Higher education could lead to higher comprehension and greater faith. He, therefore, spread his Enlightenment Christianity throughout the higher education institutions he helped to found.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ***THE YOUTH'S PRIMER AND SCRIPTURE ANIMALS-THE PINNACLE PUBLICATIONS OF FISHER'S ENLIGHTENMENT CHRISTIANITY***

#### **Introduction**

Fisher's *Youth's Primer* (1817) and *Scripture Animals* (1834) exemplified his stance as an Enlightenment Christian. His viewpoints did not change between 1817 and 1834. *Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals* both insist that Christianity is the ultimate source of knowledge.<sup>152</sup> These works contend that everything in nature and history can be explained through Divine Providence. These publications perfectly mirror his contributions to other educational facilities in the Penobscot region. He allowed his primary and secondary students to read secular texts because the books did not compromise his or their faith. Science and religion never threatened Christianity- they only supported it.

*Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals* resembled older models of educational works, but contained their own unique twists. Primers and natural histories were often concise texts that offered very little analysis. Fisher's works provided scientific information and ready explanations of natural phenomenon that relied upon Christianity for support. He hoped that whomever read these texts would be inspired by his Enlightenment Christianity.

#### **Primer History**

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<sup>152</sup> This thesis uses the Fisher, Jonathan *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible* (Princeton: Pyne Press, 1972).

Jonathan Fisher, *The Youth's Primer: containing a series of short verses in alphabetical order, each followed by religious, moral, or historical observations; the Westminster Assembly's Shorter catechism, with brief Scripture proofs; a short sketch of Scripture chronology; and several original hymns: Adorned with cuts: Written for the entertainment and instruction of youth, and designed to be a sequel to The child's primer* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1817) and Jonathan Fisher *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible* (Princeton: Pyne Press, 1972). The original *Scripture Animals* was published in 1834 and can be found at the University of Maine Folger Library Special Collections, Reference: Rare BS663 .F5 1834.

The combination of the alphabet and Scripture has long existed in printed form. Historian Paul Leicester Ford noted that the “Enschedé Abecedarium...which was printed in the fifteenth century, contained besides the alphabet the Pater Nostern the Ave Maria, the Credo, and two prayers, being the elementary book of the Romish Church.”<sup>153</sup> In England, educational books containing the alphabet and catechism books remained largely separate. There was a monopoly on both books, and the Anglican printers, who were able to combine them, published them at a high price. The Puritans were responsible for the first true English primer, or books with a combination of the alphabet and a catechism. The earliest British primer was *Catechisme of Christiane Religion, taught in scholes* and was printed in Edinburg in 1591. This was followed by the work of the Irish Bishop Bedell in 1631, and the *Catechism for young Children appointed by the act of the Church of Scotland* in 1636. The Christian martyr George Fox released his *Primer and Catechism with several delightful Things* in 1670.<sup>154</sup> Seventeenth-century primers typically contained catechisms from the denomination publishing the work and an alphabet. Monaghan argued that primers were best remembered for their alphabets and couplets. She remarked that common themes included the fragile nature of human life and the providential dangers of disobedience.<sup>155</sup>

When the Puritans immigrated to the Americas, they were able to create catechism void of any Anglican influence. The New England ministers relished the challenge. Cotton Mather noted that “few pastors of mankind ever took such pains as catechizing as have been taken by our New England divines. Now let any man living read the most judicious and elaborate

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<sup>153</sup>Paul Leicester Ford, *the New England Primer: A History of its Origins and Development with a Reprint of the Unique Copy of the Earliest Known Edition and Many Facsimile Illustrations and Reproductions* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1962), 4.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>155</sup> Monaghan, 100-101.



catechism published.”<sup>156</sup> The Westminster Assembly catechism prevented churches from fracturing over their own catechisms; however, such an Anglican product was hardly welcomed by New England dissenters.

This dissatisfaction continued until the publication of *The New England Primer* in 1687. Samuel Eliot Morison in *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, noted, “The New England Puritans were as prompt in setting up a press as in establishing schools and colleges.”<sup>157</sup> In the first ten years of the first New England printing press, there were twenty-three imprints. *The New England Primer* was first released between 1687 and 1690 by printer Benjamin Harris. He had escaped to Boston in 1686 in order to avoid the ascendancy of Catholicism under James II. The work was largely influenced by Harrison’s work *The Protestant Tutor* which was intended to instill anti-Papist tendencies in children. *The Protestant Tutor* contained the alphabet, the syllabarium or “Alphabet of Lessons,” the Lord’s Prayer, Creed, Ten Commandments, the names of the books of the Bible, and the Poem of John Rogers with a picture of his burning.<sup>158</sup> *The New England Primer* occasionally varied in content; however, it almost always contained religious maxims, woodcuts, alphabetical assistants, acronyms, catechism answers, and moral lessons. It was frequently created with a thin sheet of horn or paper shellacked to a wooden board. *The New-England Primer* was the first reading primer designed for the American colonies.<sup>159</sup>

### **Primer Format**

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<sup>156</sup> Cotton Mather, “A Modest and Cleere Answer to Mr. Balls Discourse” in *Diary of Cotton Mather* (New York: F. Ungar Publishing Company, 1957), 45.

<sup>157</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England*, 8th edition (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1980), 113.

<sup>158</sup> John Dunton, William Henry Whitmore, Michael Perry, and Massachusetts Prince Society, *John Dunton’s Letters from New England*, Volume 4 (Boston, Massachusetts: Prince Society, 1867), 144.

<sup>159</sup> *New England Primer: Or, an easy and pleasant guide to the art of reading. Adorned with cuts. To which is added the catechism*, (Boston, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Sabbath School Society, 1810).

*The New England Primer* was incredibly successful. Scholar Gail Schmunk Murray remarked that “it became the principle schoolbook, religious text, and book for home instruction in colonial America.”<sup>160</sup> One Boston bookseller in 1700 noted that he had “28 Primmers” and “44 doz. Primmers” in his inventory.<sup>161</sup> Benjamin Franklin recorded having sold 37,000 copies in Philadelphia between 1749 and 1766.<sup>162</sup> A reported two million were sold in the eighteenth century alone.<sup>163</sup> No copies of editions before 1727 are known to survive; earlier editions are known only from publishers' and booksellers' advertisements. The Primer continued to be printed in the nineteenth century and was even used at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Historian Patricia Crain noted “What the *Primer*'s image-rhyme combination has... is a purposeful turn away from the alphabet's inherent meaninglessness.”<sup>164</sup> Until well into the nineteenth century, the nickname for the alphabet was “Christ's Cross” or “crossrow,” a symbol which conveyed information and generated ritualistic behavior. Crain stated, “The pedagogy of the crossrow draws upon the Church's institutional roles as a visual memory theater and as a site of oral rituals.”<sup>165</sup> There was an increased association between the alphabet and images throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Comenius' *Orbis Pictus* (1658) helped to revolutionize our western concept of the alphabet. The *Orbis Pictus* was similar to an encyclopedia and was one of the first picture books intended for children. Comenius asserted that learning the alphabet must precede perceiving the

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<sup>160</sup> Gail Schmunk Murray, *American Children's Literature and the Construction of Childhood* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 11.

<sup>161</sup> John Davenport, *The saints anchor-hold in all storms and tempests: Preached in sundry sermons; And Published for the Support and Comfort of God's People, in all Times of Tryal*, (Benjamin Harris, at the Golden-Boar's-Head, against the Cross-Keys-Inn, in Grace church-street, 1701), 4.

<sup>162</sup> Williams Sloane, *Children's Books in England and America in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: King's Crown Press, 1955), 30.

<sup>163</sup> Kyle B. Roberts "Rethinking The New-England Primer" in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 104 (December 2010), 489–523 and Eleazer Moody, *The School of Good Manners*, quoted in Monica Keifer, *American Children Through their Books, 1700-1835* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1948), 75.

<sup>164</sup> Patricia Crain, *The Story of A: The Alphabetization of America from The New England Primer to the Scarlet Letter* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

world. He also added pictures alongside the alphabet and tried to make sense of the alphabet stripped of religious meaning and to instead associate them with the natural world. Crain argued that while the *Orbis Pictus* was cosmopolitan and humanist, *The New England Primer* was provincial, doctrinaire and evangelical. Comenius's project was to renew Latin and therefore mankind by recovering the alphabet's God-given natural source. *The Primer* on the other hand, did what it could with the fallen language. Crain noted, "The *art* of reading was the technique of transferring the skills of alphabetic reading-comprehending the world- to alphabetic reading and consisted in learning how to look at and comprehend print; learning how to look at pictures in books; and, along the way, learning what books are good for."<sup>166</sup> The rhymes convey more immediate meaning with their origins- they draw their rhymes from everywhere and anywhere. The *Primer* is full of contradictions: literate versus oral/folk ways of looking at the world, the ethic of fifth-commandment piety with the new non-aristocratic, iconoclastic and in some ways anti-authoritarian ethic of Puritanism and the beginnings of a consumer revolution. Crain argued, "From 1750 on, the alphabet was dressed up and decked out, animated, ornamented, narrated, and consumed."<sup>167</sup>

### **Other Popular Juvenile Works**

*The New England Primer* was not the only work available for children. Gillian Brown argued that numerous children books outside of the *Primer* were incredibly interactive. She stated,

Like books, pictures do not directly supply children with a sense of the material world; rather, they introduce children to, as they assist them with, the task of thinking. Indeed, publishers usually framed juvenile books as chatty letters or addresses to children, which mentioned persons and events that children might know from other contexts and other books. The intertextuality of the books both models and encourages conversation.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>168</sup> Gillian Brown, "The Metamorphic Book: Children's Print Culture in the Eighteenth Century" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* Volume 39, Number 3, (Spring 2006), 355.

Whether or not the pedagogical aspect of books engaged children, the works were interactive regardless. Recreational books for children became more widely accepted in the eighteenth century and numerous American buyers were fully aware of what was on the market. Children would have owned only a handful of such books and would have moved on to adult material at an early age. The first New England publisher to seriously reprint children's works was Isaiah Thomas. Most of the books retained their English nature because his alterations were superficial and inconsistent. The first American school books outside of the *Primer* made their debut in the 1780s. These included Noah Webster's *Spelling Book*, Jedidah Morse's *Geography Made Easy* and Nicholas Pike's *Arithmetic*. Gillian Avery noted, "Now came a New England genre of writing that evolved out of the wish to promote mental improvement- information informally and zestfully imparted over a huge variety of topics ranging from Athens to zebras...which could invariably express himself in a most readable and friendly manner."<sup>169</sup> Juvenile newspapers and tracts became increasingly popular and aimed to improve a child's character and intelligence.

### **Fisher and His Primer**

Fisher published his *Youth's Primer* (1817) during a period of greater interconnection between religion, images and the alphabet, greater interactivity between the author, book and reader and increased rationality in children's literature that *The New England Primer* was incredibly popular during the life of Jonathan Fisher. As churches evolved so too did their desire for relevant primers. *The New England Primer* remained unmatched in terms of sales; however, ministers were willing to leave their own imprint on juvenile education. Fisher first recorded working on his primer on January 25, 1811. On September 7, 1817 he "carried cuts for my primer to Mr. Armstrong's and signed with him the identities of the sale of copyright of my

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<sup>169</sup> Gillian Avery, *Behold the Child: American Children and their Books, 1621-1922* (Baltimore, Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 78.

primer to him.”<sup>170</sup> The *Youth's Primer* was published during the winter of that year and included twenty-eight of Fisher's own carvings.

Fisher may have modeled his own work after *The New England Primer*, nevertheless, his own interpretation reflected in his interest in nature and history. Historian David H. Waters complained that *The New England Primer* was built on rote memorization, the Puritans' distrust of uncontrolled speech and their preoccupation with childhood depravity.<sup>171</sup> Emory Elliot insisted that the *Primer* catalyzed the transformation from a wrathful God-to a gentle and loving Jesus Christ. He also felt that the *Primer* utilized rote memorization.<sup>172</sup> Primers contained images that children could relate to; nevertheless, primers did rely primarily upon a pre-determined question-answer format. Teachers asked questions and students replied with answers that were already written down for them. Primers did not inherently demand critical thinking or imagination.

Fisher's *Youth's Primer* however, did not rely solely upon memorization. He stated, “Note, It is earnestly recommended to teachers of this Primer, that they must exert themselves to make learners repeat the answers distinctly, deliberately, understandingly, solemnly, and in all respects properly, as possible.”<sup>173</sup> Nevertheless he also admired a primer that encouraged analysis and discussion. He spoke fondly of “Mr. Emerson's excellent Evangelical Primer” (1812). Emerson “hoped that this edition of the Assembly's Catechism will be found at least as valuable for children as any in print; and that young people will derive much instruction, and

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<sup>170</sup> Fisher and Smith, 405.

<sup>171</sup> David H. Watters, “‘I Spake as a Child’: Authority, Metaphor and the New England Primer” in *Early American Literature*, Vol. 20 Issue 3, December 1985, 193-213.

<sup>172</sup> Emory Elliott, *Power and the pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1975), 175-176.

<sup>173</sup> Jonathan Fisher, *The Youth's Primer: containing a series of short verses in alphabetical order, each followed by religious, moral, or historical observations; the Westminster Assembly's Shorter catechism, with brief Scripture proofs; a short sketch of Scripture chronology; and several original hymns: Adorned with cuts: Written for the entertainment and instruction of youth, and designed to be a sequel to The child's primer*, (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1817), 5.

Christians, unspeakable satisfaction from carefully consulting the numerous Scriptures referred to.”<sup>174</sup> He was incredibly fond of Biblical history as well and was convinced that it was the most interesting way for children to learn about Scripture. He stated,

Care must be taken however, not to overstrain or burden the tender mind, lest you weaken it, or occasion disrelish for your instructions. Ask your child a few questions at first. Encourage him, when he answers well; and cheerfully tell him, when he fails. Endeavors to make him consider your instructions a privilege, and render them as pleasing as possible. After asking him a few questions, talk about them familiarly, and relate to him the whole story of which they may constitute a part. In order to do this with pleasure and advantage, you may often find it useful to recur Scripture referred to after the answers. It may be very useful for the child to turn to these passages as soon as he is able.<sup>175</sup>

Fisher did not explicitly say why he felt obligated to print his own primer despite his admiration for Emerson’s primer. Emerson’s primer contained two catechisms and a brief history of the Bible. Much of Fisher’s *Youth Primer* is written in prose. Fisher also sprinkled tidbits of scientific and historical information throughout his work.

Fisher insisted that “the end of knowledge is that we may pass our time here, and our eternity hereafter in such a manner as may be for our advancement of the divine glory, for our own happiness, and for the good of those around us.”<sup>176</sup> He believed that the Bible was the best book available and that Christ had been the greatest teacher. He remarked, “Christ as a teacher, who came from God; he came with authority, such as no mere man ever possessed, and with such zeal for his Father’s glory, as never warmed the bosom of a merely human creature.”<sup>177</sup> The Bible was supposed to provide all the most important information.

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<sup>174</sup> Joseph Emerson, *The Evangelical Primer containing a minor doctrinal catechism and a minor historical catechism to which is added the Westminster Assembly’s Shorter Catechism with Short explanatory Notes, and copious Scripture Proofs and Illustrations; for the use of families and schools*, (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1817), 44. Hathi Trust Digital Archive Edition. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.32044102784428;view=1up;seq=9>

<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 8-9.

<sup>176</sup> Fisher, *The Youth’s Primer*, iv.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 55.

Fisher described the processes of life and death with frequent references scientific developments. His first description of death occurs when discussing that every person will die. His description is quite Newtonian with references to stillness and motion. He noted,

This dying, which is called *natural death*, is the parting of the soul from the body, so that the body is left in a lifeless state, without thought, or motion; being thus left, it soon putrefies and becomes loathsome, so that it is necessary to bury it under ground, out of our sight, where it moulders away due to dust.<sup>178</sup>

He ultimately attributed the cause of death to sin, however, his actual description is incredibly detailed. He also related death to the earth's axis. He noted,

Time with us is measured by the rolling spheres; the earth is continually rolling and revolving. Once in a little more than 365 days it performs a circuit about the sun at a vast distance from him; this revolution makes a year. Once in 24 hours the earth rolls round on its axis from West to East; this makes day and night. When the earth has done revolving, time with respect to this world will be swallowed up in eternity. When the earth has rolled a few hours after dawn of the morning, it brings us again to the darkness of night.<sup>179</sup>

Life is compared to the daytime, while death was related to the night. For Fisher, time in respect to human beings was the period from birth until death while time with relation to earth was the interval between creation and destruction. His explanation of the earth's axis is used to demonstrate that death or destruction, like the evening, comes to all of us eventually. He used this metaphor to urge his readers to prepare for heaven.

Fisher used the earth's axis metaphor once more while describing the Book of Revelations. He stated, "The earth by rolling eastward on its axis brings every part of its surface once in twenty-four hours towards the starry sky, away from the sun; while the earth is thus

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

rolling, as it becomes midnight in every place, the glorious Judge will be seen.”<sup>180</sup> He described the return of the archangels and the resurrection of the righteous dead alongside his astronomical explanation. He wished to convey to his readers that the heavens were a creation of God and could be used to understand and appreciate his heavenly plan.

Life is also compared to a bubble. He mentioned, “Our present *life* is called a bubble, because of its shortness, and this ease with which it may be destroyed. A bubble, blown up in a strong lixivium, or suds, with a pipe, may be made to sail in the air a few moments, and then its bursts, such is life.”<sup>181</sup> He used the example of the bubble to convince his readers to devote their short life to religious instead of earthly pursuits.

*The Youth’s Primer* dwells at length on the natural world. He described the quail in surprising detail. “The Quail is a bird much resembling the Partridge in appearance and manners, and of about half the size. Its flesh is naturally very good for food; but the just judgment of God can easily convert the most wholesome food into poison.”<sup>182</sup> He also included a description of the wolf. “The wolf is a ravenous, blood-thirsty animal, somewhat larger than what we commonly call a large dog. He is usually of a greyish red, much resembling the color the Catamount, the grey fox, or the wild rabbit in the summer.”<sup>183</sup> These creatures are used in order to highlight stories from the Bible; and such detailed account of the animals’ behavior and appearance is a unique contribution to Fisher’s primer. He even considered human beings to be creatures. He felt that all creatures should be treated with compassion. He remarked, “We are all creatures and depend upon God for life, and for all the blessings we enjoy; we are sinful creatures also, and depend upon the rich grace of God in Jesus Christ for the pardon of sin, and

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 46.



for the salvation of our souls from eternal death.”<sup>184</sup> All creatures in one way or another relied upon the goodness and generosity of God.

Fisher also included elaborate history lessons in *The Youth's Primer*. He included an incredibly complex account of the Persian emperor Cyrus, who delivered the Israelites from servitude in Babylon. Many writers at the time would have only mentioned Cyrus in relation to this deliverance. Emerson was one such writer. Fisher provides almost the entire history of the dynasty along with fascinating anecdotes. He intended that students absorb both information and morality lessons from his historical accounts. He emphasized that students should *learn* from the tales of Jacob and Joseph. He even listed the lessons he believed students should obtain for the life and work of Paul the Apostle. His ultimate goal was for students to embrace lessons from “that best of books.”<sup>185</sup> Jacob, Joseph, and Paul were excellent examples of those who benefitted from their faith in God. He hoped that children would also welcome with a relationship with God.

Numerous children's primers, including Emerson's primer, incorporated short accounts of ancient Biblical history. Fisher enjoyed including modern anecdotes as well from both abroad and closer to his home. He provided commentary about recent events. He stated,

The signs of the times, now in the commencement of the nineteenth century, are such, as to intimate a revival of the apostolic age. Already a great number of Christians are stirred up to spread the Gospel among the heathen. Many missionaries are already gone forth, and are laboring with success. God seems to be wonderfully preparing the way, to cause all dominions to serve and obey him. He is rising up, and sending abroad into the world a new generation of apostles.<sup>186</sup>

He also delivered an account of the “Black Prince of Naimbanna” who was sent to England in 1791 to learn about Christianity. This prince died on his return journey home at the age of

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>185</sup> Jonathan Fisher, *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible*, Revised Edition, iv.

<sup>186</sup> Fisher, *The Youth's Primer*, 33.

twenty-five, but had been “saved” through his conversion. This story was originally printed from, *New York Miss Magazine*, Volume 1, a work that Fisher gifted to one of his daughters.<sup>187</sup>

Several of his examples were derived from local experiences. He included an anecdote about a woman in Maine who “could speak but broken English, but appeared to a person of piety.”<sup>188</sup> He did not state what the woman’s ethnicity was, however, her lack of education, demonstrated that anyone, especially the children reading the primer, was capable of prayer.

Fisher included a husbandry metaphor in his primer. He was a farmer as well as a minister and would have been well acquainted with the practices of husbandry. He noted, “when the husbandman is about to break up his ground, that he may subdue it, and make it fit for the seed, he brings his oxen together and puts a yoke upon their neck... When Christ requires us to take upon his yoke, he means we should with all cheerfulness enter his service.”<sup>189</sup> Such an example would have reverberated with the readers of the primer, for many of them would have probably been actively engaged in husbandry. This example also hints at his work outside his ministry and education. He was engaged with farming, carpentry and numerous other occupations outside of the ministry.

Fisher’s most personal example occurred when discussing chastity. He rarely referred to himself by name, but he did so with a penname in this section. He stated,

To preserve chastity, let marriage come to your aid in due season; to this end let early industry and careful economy provide for the charges of the marriage state. When connected live joyfully with your partner. Never allow your affections to rove after forbidden objects; love one another tenderly; and may the blessing of God rest upon you. Such is the desire of your sincere friend.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Jane Bianco, 43.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 43.

Was Fisher referencing his previous romance before his marriage with Dolly Fisher?<sup>191</sup> Was he merely hoping that his own marital bliss would serve as an example for the younger generation?

This section is preceded by two pages regarding the dangers of temptation and a quip from *Reynold's Sinfulness of Sin*. He is not explicit about his exact intentions; however, he did sign the passage with the penname "Benevolus" and his location and date of "Blue Hill. Jan. 1813."<sup>192</sup>

### *Scripture Animals*

Fisher was explicit about the purpose of his book. He remarked,

The work is designed especially to assist young people in gaining knowledge of the natural history of the Bible that with what helps they have on the other subjects, and from other sources, they may be able to read that best of books with a good understanding of its contents. As the close of most articles I have added something in a way of moralizing, or spiritualizing, that my young readers may be led to practical and useful meditations, which may meliorate both heart and life.<sup>193</sup>

He further added that he had included Hebrew, Greek and Latin because he thought it likely that it may be read by those studying those languages and thus assist them, or it might inspire someone to seek further language education like it did for him.

Fisher was unafraid to moralize. The supposed temperaments or actions of animals were supposedly meant to remind human beings to behave with propriety. He was the most critical of drunkenness, laziness and disorderliness. He argued that, "strong drink, received impertinently, may be compared to the stinging of an Adder, because like poison its intoxicating influence is diffused through the whole system."<sup>194</sup> Fleas were considered troublesome creatures but only to the "indolence of the sluttish."<sup>195</sup> His solution to rid oneself of fleas was to become more organized and well-kept. He remarked, "when the bed-room is well finished and kept clean, and

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<sup>191</sup> This romance is referenced throughout 1795. Fisher and Smith, 157-180

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Jonathan Fisher, *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible*, Revised Edition, iv.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 104

the bed-clothes frequently washed and changed, the troublesome invader commonly retires.”<sup>196</sup> Lice were also “little unwelcome insects” and were usually, “the attendants of sloth, negligence, and filth. To those, who will be indolent and filthy, they are a just and daily punishment.”<sup>197</sup>

Fisher opposed hunting or cruelty towards animals. He confessed with regards to bees that it wounded his, “tender feelings thus to destroy them,” despite the fact that bees were often destructive.<sup>198</sup> He described cock-fighting as “savage and cruel” and one that “should never be mentioned, but in terms of decided disapprobation.”<sup>199</sup> He also disapproved of hunting rabbits for sport. He remarked, “occasionally to take a Hare for food is innocent: to hunt them in mere sport, as many have done, is a species of barbarity, which I desire my dear readers ever to avoid.”<sup>200</sup> One of the few animals that he had no qualms about killing was the serpent. He argued that human beings and serpents were naturally hostile toward one another. This antagonism was attributed to the conflict between the serpent or the Devil and Adam and Eve in the first book of Genesis. Fisher stated, “I have but little doubt, but that these feelings towards Serpents is the result of a divine constitution, the object of which is to keep in remembrance the instrument, used by the prince of devils, in tempting our first parents to eat of the forbidden fruit.”<sup>201</sup>

Fisher interestingly incorporated categorizations of the various species of human beings. These species included, Africans, Eskimos, Tartars, Native Americans, Southern Asiatics, and Europeans and Americans. Fisher was less concerned about physical features and cultural practices and more interested in the intellectual capacity and the spiritual beliefs of the different species. He argued that climate was a significant factor in intelligence. According to Fisher,

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, 105.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 320.

people who lived in more extreme climates, such as African and Eskimos, were more apt to focus on survival and less on education. He believed that Africans were less intelligent than other species. He attributed this lack of knowledge not only to the “debilitating influence of the climate” of the African continent, but also to the “oppression, which they have extensively experienced from other nations, more powerful and domineering than from climate.”<sup>202</sup> He however, was not without his own small prejudices. He confessed,

I must believe that it was through the superintending providence of God, that they received their lot in a part of the world so much calculated to fit them to be servants, in fulfillment of the ancient prediction.- But whenever we look upon an African, let us not say within ourselves, This man was made for a slave, and it is right that we should enslave him; but rather let us say; If the iniquity of Ham, in his immodest conduct, have been so long visited upon his posterity; let us cultivate modesty, and due respect for our superiors, with the most scrupulous attention.<sup>203</sup>

Ham, the father of Canaan, was the son of Noah was said to be cursed. The tale of his curse is recorded in Genesis 9:18-25. Noah got drunk and started to work naked in his vineyard. Ham saw his father naked and told his two brothers Shem and Japheth. His two brothers proceeded to cover their father and send him to bed. When Noah realized that Ham had not tried to help him, he shouted, “Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers.”<sup>204</sup> It was commonly believed during the nineteenth-century that Africans were descended from Ham. This passage from Genesis was one of the most used by pro-slavery activists to justify slavery.<sup>205</sup> He supported the abolition of slavery as well as the migration of freed slaves to Liberia. He did not feel that he could disagree with this passage in Genesis; however, He also felt compassion for anyone who was suffering.

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 326.

<sup>204</sup> Genesis 9:25, Revised Standard Version Bible.

<sup>205</sup> David M. Goldberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2003), 1.

Fisher next described the Eskimos who lived near the Arctic Circle. He believed that these people lacked scientific inclinations but could possibly be converted to Christianity. He then described the Tartars or those of Northern Asian descent, with “their religious ideas that are vague and various, according to the religions of the nations, upon which they border: but most are worshippers of the Grand Lama of Tibet.”<sup>206</sup> He remarked that European and American Protestant missionaries attempted to convert the Tartars but were generally thwarted by “the proud, overbearing conduct of the Papists” who had already visited the continent.<sup>207</sup> He was fonder of Native Americans than he was of the previous three species. He commented, “They generally have some notion of a future state, and of a great Spirit above, who rules the world. Where the Roman Catholics have had access to them, many of them have become bigoted to their religion; where they have not, that are to a good measure accessible by Protestants, and somewhat readily receive instruction in pure Christianity.”<sup>208</sup> He also believed that Native Americans were more inclined towards the sciences and in time could, “become Christianized, civilized, and respectable among Christian nations.”<sup>209</sup> His more favorable impression can largely be attributed to his work and relations among the Penobscot nation. He worked as a missionary with the Penobscot. He attempted to learn their language and created a written version of it.<sup>210</sup>

Fisher was less impressed by Southern Asiatics or those of Indian or Persian descent. He remarked,

they extensively believe the doctrine of the trans-migration of souls; and at their death their spirit passes into the body of some beast, bird or reptile...The Arabians

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<sup>206</sup> Fisher, *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible*, Revised Edition, 329.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 332.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

<sup>210</sup> Raoul N. Smith, "A Description of the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Indians in 1808," *Man in the Northeast* 14(1978, 52-56 and Raoul N. Smith, "An Early Nineteenth Century Penobscot Wordlist," *International Journal of American Linguistics* 43(1977), 101-104.

and Persians are chiefly Mohamedans... The Hindoos, Burmans and Siamese are generally pagans, and the number of the idol Gods is very great. Among them are a few Mohamedans, a few Jews, and a few that bear the name of Christians, but have little more than the name.<sup>211</sup>

He believed that in time Christians missionaries would be able to convert more Southern Asiatics, but at the time he was more disgusted by their “paganism” than he was hopeful for the future. He undeniably believed those of European descent was the superior human species. He exclaimed,

as respects universality of genius, strength of mind for deep investigation, patience in labor, and boldness of enterprise, the Europeans doubtless excel all the other varieties of mankind; no others to an equal measure surround themselves with the comforts of life; not others are in general so cleanly in their modes of living.<sup>212</sup>

He was most moved by the strength of Christianity amongst Europeans and Americans. He had commented on the intellectual capacity of all the species in his descriptions, but he was chiefly concerned about a species’ degree of devotion or potential to be converted to Christianity. The popularity of Christianity amongst Europeans and those of European descent is what truly set them apart from other species. He admitted that several supposed Christians had begun to neglect their spirituality; however, he was confident that Christian nations had begun to see, “harbingers of a reform, and of better days; and the sure word of the prophecy respecting this should animate every true Christian Philanthropist, to do his utmost to hasten this reform.”<sup>213</sup>

Fisher’s role as an “Enlightenment Christian” was demonstrated throughout this work. He attributed everything he saw in the natural world to the divine providence of God. He argued, “I may remark here that the Creator of the world has all the laws of nature perfectly under his

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<sup>211</sup> Fisher, *Scripture Animals: A Natural History of the Living Creatures Named in the Bible*, 334-335.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 337.

control, and can dispose of them as he pleases.”<sup>214</sup> Fisher was also fascinated by the habitats of swallows. He marveled, “how wonderful is that providence of God, which furnishes habitation for every kind of creature, and which adapts every creature to the habitation designed for it!”<sup>215</sup> He was not only fascinated by the various natural phenomenon, but the usefulness of various creatures. Oxen, cows and horses are regarded as marvelous animals. Fisher greatly praised the sheep. He stated, “we may now say of the Sheep in general terms, that next to the cow, it is the most valuable animal, which the benevolent Creator has been pleased to form for the use of man.”<sup>216</sup> He also found camels particularly and wonderfully valuable. He remarked, “the wonderful manner in which the camel is adapted to hot and barren regions, and his very great usefulness to the inhabitants of such regions, should confirm your faith in the overruling providence of God, and lead you to admire his goodness. - The Rein-deer is not more adapted to the Frigid Zone, than the camel is to the torrid.”<sup>217</sup> Owls were especially skilled at, “thinning off and keeping within due limits a number of kinds of small animals, and creeping things, which otherwise might so abound, as greatly to annoy us, and being a famine upon themselves.”<sup>218</sup> Vultures were “useful in South America, for eating up carcasses of beasts, which are slain for their skins, which being left on the ground, would otherwise taint the air.”<sup>219</sup>

Pests often served to remind people about the power of God. Fisher believed that an abundance of mice could remind human being to fear God. He noted,

Such a multitude of these animals appearing at one time, and they being so few at another time, and quickly reduced, may teach us to fear God, who for our sins, may suddenly raise up such an army of feeble creatures, as shall cut off our hopes,

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 288.



and greatly distress us; also to look to him for relief, seeing he can so readily remove the evils we suffer.<sup>220</sup>

Crocodiles or “dragons” even considered very destructive, even killing their own young. Such filicide could be considered contemptible. However, Fisher argued, “In this way kind providence prevents the multiplication of an animal, which otherwise might desolate whole regions of the country.”<sup>221</sup>

The “chain of being” concept stated that every existing thing in the universe had its “place” in a divinely planned hierarchical order. Creatures that served no obvious purpose for human being nevertheless had providential importance. Beetles and locusts were considered generally bothersome and useless, nevertheless Fisher insisted, “they probably enjoy such a portion of happiness, as is more than a balance for all the suffering which they occasion.”<sup>222</sup> Lizards also conjured similar sentiments. He noted, “the sight of the Lizard is to most person unpleasant, because of its measure of resemblance to a serpent, between which and the human race there is an unconquerable enmity, But no doubt the Lizard form a useful link in the chain of being, and enjoys a portion of happiness, which renders its existence to itself a blessing.”<sup>223</sup> He also remarked that numerous people found apes disconcerting because of their resemblance to human beings. He argued that one should not fear apes, but instead regard them as part of God’s providence. He stated, “calm reflection may lead us to view in them, the wonderful wisdom of God, who has left no vacancy in his works, but has made a chain of being perfect from the living atom, which sports in the dew drop, to the highest Archangel.”<sup>224</sup> He believed that one should trust God’s wisdom, even if the purpose of an animal defied explanation. He mentioned that the

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

Israelites of the Old Testament were forbidden from eating pigs because their flesh was considered unclean. Nineteenth-century Americans ate pigs and would therefore be apt to doubt whether a hog's flesh truly promoted the plague. He argued that regardless, "if there were no such reasons, God's will should satisfy us."<sup>225</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Jane Bianco in her work *Wondrous Journey: Jonathan Fisher and the Making of Scripture Animals* argued that Fisher's published works were a reflection of his love of learning, teaching, and drawing. Fisher extended his passion for education from the classroom and home to the printed word. *Scripture Animals* and *Youth's Primer* combined Fisher's roles as a minister and educator and his support of Enlightenment and Christian ideals. Other primers focused upon catechisms and other information related to Christianity. His educational works compellingly combined scientific and historical information that was assumed to be compatible with God's providence. These works are perhaps the greatest examples of his stance as an Enlightenment Christian on the Northeastern frontier. Fisher could confidently speculate over the purpose of creatures such as lizards because he believed that God would ultimately provide an answer. For Fisher, one could study science and history and be certain that everything served a divine purpose. His publications were intended to convey his Enlightenment Christianity to a broader population outside of the confinements of the Northeastern frontier.

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid., 275.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis started with a quote from twentieth-century children's author Scott O'Dell: "I want to teach and say something to people. Adults have pretty well established their lives, but you can say something to children."<sup>226</sup> How does a person "say something" to children? Can something "really be done with children?" Fisher involved himself in local schools, libraries and education within his home, established and maintained the Blue Hill Academy and the Bangor Theological Seminary, and he published his juvenile works *The Youth's Primer* (1817) and *Scripture Animals* (1834) in order to convey his personal beliefs. He was an Enlightenment Christian whom did not feel threatened by secular works, because Christianity in his world would prevail. The secular works he approved of in the primary and secondary schools were necessities on the Northeastern frontier, but ultimately harmless. He was confident in his faith and was convinced that education could instill religious certainty in others. Science and history were important, but Christianity was far superior. *The Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals* express that one can be curious about the world, but one should, at the end of the day, trust in God.

His passion for education, the success of Blue Hill Academy and Bangor Theological seminary alumni, and the legacy of *The Youth's Primer* and *Scripture Animals* demonstrate that he was able to "say something" to children. He successfully established educational institutions that connected his formal schooling and status as a town minister, his love of science and his religious convictions, with the frontier realities of Blue Hill, Maine. He really could do something with children and do it in a way that was exceptional to his time period and location.

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<sup>226</sup> Emma Fisher and Justin Wintle, 173.

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